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EFFECTS OF HIGH INTEREST OPINION WRITING PROMPTS

FOR 5th GRADE STUDENTS

WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

by

Emily Theresa Stanton

A creative project submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

in

Special Education

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2016

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ABSTRACT**EFFECTS OF HIGH INTEREST OPINION WRITING PROMPTS FOR 5th GRADE STUDENTS WITH
LEARNING DISABILITIES**

by

Emily Theresa Stanton, Master of Education

Utah State University, 2016

Major Professor: Dr. Benjamin Lignugaris/Kraft
Department: Special Education

As academic expectations increase for all students in the United States, students with learning disabilities (LD) face increasing academic pressure. The 2011 Utah CORE standards and the National Common Core State Standards both place a high level of importance on all types of writing, and mandate that by the time students complete secondary schooling, they will be competent writers who are skilled in all aspects of argumentative writing. Argumentative writing includes many aspects; examining a topic, choosing a side, researching and evaluating sources, presenting supporting evidence, examining and evaluating supports, and eventually presenting both sides of a contentious issue fairly and completely in the format of well-written, thoroughly researched, correctly cited and unique text. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.K-5, CCR Anchor Standard for Writing 1, 4, 7-10.)

The purpose of this creative project is to examine the extent to which high interest opinion writing prompts for 5th grade students in special education improve the planning, organization and structure of student's opinion essays as measured by the total words they write on the topic (TWW) the number of correct writing sequences (CWS) and critical

components of opinion writing (CCOW) in a timed writing sample when compared to low interest opinion writing prompts.

After being explicitly taught the SRSD – POW+TREE writing strategy, participants will complete 20 timed opinion writing samples based on high and low interest opinion writing prompts. The teacher anticipates that the high interest opinion writing samples will produce higher accuracy and more writing overall (TWW) in comparison to low interest opinion writing samples. If these results are obtained, the information will be used to construct opinion writing lessons for 5th grade students with LD.

Keywords: self-regulated strategy instruction, special education teachers, writing

(61 pages)

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

EFFECTS OF HIGH INTEREST OPINION WRITING PROMPTS FOR 5th GRADE STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

Emily Theresa Stanton

The purpose of this creative project is to examine the extent to which high interest opinion writing prompts for four 5th grade students with learning disabilities (LD) improve the planning, organization and structure of their opinion essays as measured by the total words they write on the topic (TWW) the number of correct writing sequences (CWS) the overall accuracy of their writing, and critical components of opinion writing (CCOW) in a timed writing sample when compared to low interest opinion writing prompts.

Initially participants will select high and low interest writing topics using a prompt selection procedure. Given 50 potential writing topics, students will select their top 10 high and low interest prompts.

After being explicitly taught the SRSD – POW+TREE writing strategy, participants will complete 20 timed opinion writing samples based on high and low interest opinion writing prompts. TWW, CWS, Accuracy and CCOW will be measured and recorded by the researcher. This information will be used to determine areas of needed instruction for 5th grade students with LD in the curriculum area of writing.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am so very grateful to so many people for their support throughout this process. My committee, Dr. Benjamin Lignugaris/Kraft, Dr. Charles Salzberg, and Dr. Robert Morgan, for their time, expertise and suggestions. Particularly, I would like to thank Dr. Benjamin Lignugaris/Kraft, my major professor. This was a long and difficult path, and I am grateful for his guidance and insight throughout this creative project.

My students, my administrators and my fellow teachers made it possible for me to pursue this degree while teaching, supported me throughout the process, and cheered me on.

My friends and family deserve my deepest thanks and gratitude. My parents, daughter and husband deserve special thanks. They kept my life running while I worked, and were patient and encouraging. Thank you for believing in me and going on this journey with me. I could not have done this without all of you.

Emily Theresa Stanton

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Introduction

For students with learning disabilities (LD) who are often classified as passive learners, (Chlarson, 2011) the arduous process of writing may strip much or all of their enthusiasm and personal voice out of their prose, a situation which Chlarson found was somewhat mitigated by allowing writers to choose their own high interest prompts for narrative writing. It is likely that a similar design will be effective for increasing the amount and the quality of opinion and argument writing in students with LD when coupled with a genre specific strategy writing approach. For this paper, “genre” refers to style or type of writing.

The process of developing as a writer begins in primary school. First, students are expected to write on a topic, either to inform and/or entertain. This is expository writing. According to the Utah CORE and the Common Core State Standards, (CCSS) students should master this skill by third grade. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.1) The next level of difficulty is opinion writing. In opinion writing, the student must not only inform and/or entertain but must also determine and develop their own feelings on a topic, and make these feelings clear to a reader. This skill should be mastered by the end of primary school, usually at the completion of 5th grade. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.1) The next level of complexity is persuasive writing, which requires the writer to inform or entertain a reader, make their own feelings clear in their writing, and encourage the reader to feel the same. Students should be adept at persuasive writing by the end of middle school or junior high, usually at the completion of 8th grade. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.1.) Persuasive writing leads to argument writing, which requires that all the previous conditions are met, with the additional step of presenting both sides of an issue fairly, with sources, and inviting the reader to choose a side. Students are expected to master this skill by the end of secondary schooling, or when students graduate at the end of 12th grade. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.12.1)

Many people begin to develop opinions and strong preferences at very young ages and some of their first verbalizations are to argue or state their opinion, or lodge a dramatic protest when input is disregarded (Dunn, 1988, p. 15). The ability to coherently and persuasively express these strong emotions in writing develops much later in life. Finding and expressing an opinion is a vital first step in the argumentative writing process.

According to Graham (2013), in the majority of US classrooms, very little time is currently spent teaching students to write after 3rd grade, and students do very little writing in or out of school for academic purposes. However, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and the Utah State Core Standards aim to change this by placing a strong emphasis on both learning to write and writing to learn. Educators are seeking and implementing innovative ways to include literacy in the curriculum for students with LD, with a focus on organization, idea generation, and the production of a coherent, organized final product (Baker et al., 2003).

In the CCSS Anchor Standards, there is a note on the range and content of student writing which highlights the importance of writing for academic success, especially opinion or argument writing:

To build a foundation for college and career readiness, students need to learn to use writing as a way of offering and supporting opinions, demonstrating understanding of the subjects they are studying, and conveying real and imagined experiences and events. They learn to appreciate that a key purpose of writing is to communicate clearly to an external, sometimes unfamiliar, audience, and they begin to adapt the form and content of their writing to accomplish a particular task and purpose. They develop the capacity to build knowledge on a subject through research projects and to respond analytically to literary and informational sources. To meet these goals students must

devote significant time and effort to writing, producing numerous pieces over short and extended time frames throughout the year. (p. 18)

The authors of the CORE recognize that opinion writing is a vital skill for all learners seeking to become critical thinkers. The CORE standards do not simply suggest opinion writing as part of the curriculum, they specifically mandated opinion writing, beginning in primary school, and continuing into argumentative writing in secondary school. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.1-5.10.)

According to Hillocks (2011), written argument at every level of complexity is the core of critical thinking. It is not, as people often think, a simple dispute that can be won by volume or persistence. Instead, argument is about making a case in support of a claim in everyday affairs. The ability to write an opinion, use writing to persuade others to agree with you, or present both sides of an issue completely and fairly, is vital to the development of critical thinking.

Improvement in writing performance requires a motivated writer, a competent instructor, and many practice opportunities, coupled with carefully designed and sequenced instruction (Graham & Harris, 1988).

Wong (1997) designed, developed and implemented general and genre specific interventions to help adolescents with learning disabilities and low achievement find success in writing tasks. Wong explained to her students that writing of all types is by its very nature recursive, and always requires planning, writing, and revising. She implemented a think-aloud as an initial step, talking students through the process of planning before writing. This is effective as a general intervention. Throughout the writing process, members of Wong's intervention team were available to help students articulate their intent and ideas, structure their sentences, and provide help with usage questions regarding word choice, sentence structure and spelling.

In addition to the general strategies for improving writing, students were also taught genre (e.g., Reportive, Opinion, and Compare/Contrast) specific strategies as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1
Genre Specific Focus of Instruction

	Types of Essays	Reportive	Opinion	Compare and Contrast
Focus of Instruction	General guidelines (across all genres)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clarity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clarity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clarity
	Genre Specific guidelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connection to topic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Persuasiveness of argument Organization of argument 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All ideas support comparison or contrast Organization of ideas

This 3-year study showed clear improvements for students in three genres of writing instruction. Their gains, as measured by pretest and posttest on target dependent measures, were statistically significant with large effect sizes. One reason that students were successful was because the strategies were both general and genre specific. One evidence based intervention that utilizes a general and specific approach to writing instruction is self-regulated strategy development (SRSD) (Graham et al., 2013; Harris et al., 2003; Mason & Graham 2008).

SRSD to Improve Writing

SRSD helps struggling learners through the explicit and systematic teaching of the writing process (Graham et al., 2013). SRSD includes the use of mnemonic devices, general, specific and incremental goal-setting and self-monitoring, and positive self-talk through all parts of the writing process. SRSD strategies can be used for planning, writing and revising tasks (Graham et al., 2013).

Struggling learners of all ages benefit from strategy instruction and accompanying self-regulation self-talk strategies explicitly taught through all steps of the writing process, and

produce better writing, as measured by total words written, correct writing sequences, and by holistic measures of writing quality, such as a grading rubric, when given discrete steps to follow and a method (usually a mnemonic device) to help the learner remember the steps (Graham et al., 2013). These self-regulation strategies have a lasting positive impact on the writing of struggling learners (De La Paz & Graham, 2002).

In SRSD the generic self-regulation strategy is POW (**P**lan your writing, **O**rganize your notes, **W**rite and say more). POW can be used for all genres of writing and age groups, and will improve the quality and quantity of writing. When teaching opinion writing to 5th graders, the addition of a genre specific strategy such as TREE (include a **T**opic sentence, three **R**easons and **E**xplanations (one paragraph for each) and an **E**nding paragraph) has resulted in high quality opinion essays (Graham & Harris, 1989a).

While it is clear that effective writing instruction should utilize a framework of general strategies that are effective for all writing combined with genre specific strategies, it is not clear if student interest in the writing prompt influences the quality and quantity of students' opinion compositions.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this project is to examine how high interest opinion writing prompts influence 5th grade students' opinion writing when all prompts are administered accompanied by the SRSD technique for opinion writing (POW+TREE).

Research Question

To what extent do high interest opinion writing prompts in combination with a POW + TREE opinion writing strategy result in more words written (TWW), more words written correctly (CWS), and better organized opinion compositions than when students with

mild/moderate disabilities are provided low interest opinion writing prompts in combination with a POW + TREE opinion writing strategy?

Literature Review

I searched multiple sources for articles related to general writing strategies and teaching opinion/persuasive/argumentative writing to students with LD, including EBSCOHost database (ERIC and Academic Search Premier), textbooks on instructional methods, articles recommended by professors, fellow teachers, administrators and staff, information gathered at professional development opportunities, and input from parents and other members of the community. Based on these parameters, I found 12 articles that focused on using SRSD both as a general writing intervention and specifically when teaching opinion, persuasive, or argument writing to students of any age with LD. These studies included the following research designs: repeated measures, multi-element designs, comparison studies, meta-analyses, multiple probe and multiple baseline studies.

General Interventions for improving the writing of students with LD: SRSD as POW

A strong base of research indicates that SRSD is a best practice for increasing achievement in writing for students with LD who struggle with writing as a result of their disability (Graham, et al., 2013).

Graham and Harris (1989a) taught Self-Instruction Strategy Training (which later became SRSD) to 33 5th and 6th grade students. Eleven of the students were typically achieving, and 22 of them were students with learning disabilities. This Self-Instruction Strategy Training was used to teach story grammar and produced meaningful and lasting effects on student's composition skills as well as creating a sense of self-efficacy in students. In this study, the students with learning disabilities did not increase their use of story grammar elements when compared to a contrast group of typically achieving students who had not been taught the strategy, but

typically achieving students who had been taught the strategy wrote longer and higher quality compositions after the strategy instruction as compared to their peers (Graham & Harris, 1989a).

In their 1989 comparison study, Graham and Harris created a five step process for teaching story grammar which became the basis for the POW general writing intervention. In the five step strategy, students generated ideas and took written notes for each of the basic parts of a story before starting their first draft. The five steps of the story grammar strategy were: first think of a good story idea to share with others, second to use a self-statement (such as “let my mind be free”) as you brainstorm, third to write the reminder for story parts on a paper; **WWW**, **What=2**, **How=2**, (**Who** is the main character, and who else is in the story, **When** does this story take place, **Where** does the story take place, **What** do the main characters want to do, and what do other characters want to do, **What** happens when the main characters try to do what they want, what happens with the other characters, **How** does the story end and **How** do the main characters and other characters feel?). The fourth step was writing the story while using notes as a guide, and the fifth step is to add new ideas as well as elaborate and modify initial ideas to make a story that makes sense and that others will enjoy. Students with learning disabilities in the 4th through 6th grade usually required 8 to 10 hours of instruction to master the five step story grammar strategy (Graham & Harris, 2005).

Harris, Graham and Mason (2003) later culled these five steps down to three steps, POW, to teach story grammar to an unspecified number of struggling writers in second and third grade as part of a comparison study (Graham & Harris, 2005). In POW, the three steps for writing a story are: **P**ick my idea, **O**rganize my notes, **W**rite and say more.) In the first step of POW, students think of a good story to share with others, and generate written notes, which include story grammar or other scaffolding. In the second step, students organize their notes,

write down reminders of the story parts they are planning to use, and write detailed notes for each story part. In the third step, students write their story (Graham & Harris, 2005).

Teaching SRSD consistently involves a six step scaffolded method of instruction. First students are taught the needed pre-skills, and background knowledge, including being explicitly taught the strategy and the rationale for the strategy and the benefit to them as a writer. Next the strategy is discussed and the mnemonic is taught. Immediately after the discussion phase, the strategy is modeled in a scaffolded sequence of instruction. Scaffolds include teacher demonstrations, guided practice, paired instruction, and independent practice, with opportunities for re-teaching if needed (Harris et. al. 2003). Over time, and with repetition as needed, the student memorizes and demonstrates mastery of the mnemonic, and guided practice is faded gradually until the student shows mastery of the strategy. One vitally important part of SRSD is that the mastery of these skills is criterion based. Students must demonstrate mastery of each step before they can proceed.

Within the model are embedded four self-regulation processes. These include goal setting, self-monitoring, self-instructions, and self-reinforcement (Graham et. al, 2013). First, goal setting involves students setting goals for a variety of purposes, for example, a student goal might include a certain amount of time spent writing, following a specific format for planning writing, or including specific elements of argument in their writing, maintaining specific standards for punctuation, spelling or penmanship, or getting a certain score on a grading rubric (Graham et. al, 2013). Second, self-monitoring involves students utilizing mnemonic devices and other strategies to be sure they are using their planning, writing and revision time wisely, following guidelines given by their instructor or by the writing topic such as writing format, and producing writing that meets a specific standard. For example, students may look at their first draft and their notes and graphic organizers and ask themselves, "Did I remember to use POW

on this?" (Graham et. al, 2013). Third, self-instruction involves students talking themselves through the steps of the writing process using their self-regulation strategies to write according to the purpose of their assignment, manage their time, and fulfill the requirements of their assignment. For example, a student might look at their given topic and tell themselves, "This is an opinion essay, which means POW+TREE, so I need to make sure that when I am **Planning**, **Organizing** and **Writing** that include a **Topic** sentence and at least three **Reasons** and **Explanations** for my reasons, as well as a good **Ending**." (Graham et. al, 2013). Fourth, self-reinforcement involves students internalizing, personalizing, and utilizing positive messages about themselves as learners and writers. For example, students might tell themselves that they have two hours to write, and that they must use POW+TREE, and tell themselves, "this is easy, you know how to do this, just follow the steps. When you get this done, you can go play video games!" (Graham et. al, 2013).

The efficacy, generalization and lasting impact of SRSD as a means of producing high quality writing in many genres when implemented with students of various ages, learning styles, learning differences, and educational situations is well documented (Graham et. al 2013; & Harris, 1989a, 1989b; Sexton, Harris & Graham, 1998,).

Opinion Writing: SRSD as POW+TREE

Mason, Kubina and Taft (2011) investigated the effects of SRSD using a multiple-baseline across participants study to develop the persuasive quick writing skills of 16 middle school students with disabilities, first in a group of 10 taught by a graduate student, and then in a group of six taught by a Special Education teacher. Students were taught POW + TREE (**Topic** sentence, **Reasons**-three or more, **Explain**, **Ending**.) In the initial lesson, students were introduced to POW+TREE, and the meanings of "persuasive" and "response" were discussed. Students were told that this writing strategy could be used in all their classes. The students were taught that

good persuasive responses contain a counterargument with explanation and negation. Next, transition words, such as first, next, and last were introduced. Students were then asked to find TREE in a model paper, followed by a paper they had previously written. They graphed the elements of TREE in their previously written paper, developed a goal to write a persuasive response with all parts of TREE, and signed a learning contract to indicate their commitment to learning this strategy.

In the next lesson, students were first quizzed on POW+TREE, then the instructor modeled how to use POW+TREE to write a persuasive response. Problem definition, planning, coping, self-evaluation, self-reinforcement and self-instruction were modeled by the instructor. Students then wrote personal self-instructions for future use. Next, students revised their previously written responses and took notes on steps for meeting their desired criterion; eight or more parts to the writing, including transition words and a counterargument with negation.

In lesson 3, the instructor and students collaboratively wrote a persuasive response. Students were given a blank graphic organizer, a transition chart, and their personal self-instruction sheet. The instructor guided the students through each step of POW+TREE, and encouraged them to use self-instructions. After the students wrote their paper, they counted and graphed the TREE parts of their essay. Students were rewarded with verbal praise for writing more than eight parts, and were reminded that the next lesson would begin with a test of POW+TREE.

In lesson 4, supports were faded, and students were shown how to make a TREE organizer of their own on a sheet of blank paper. Students then wrote an essay based on their own notes, then counted and graphed their response, self-reinforcing for reaching eight or more parts.

Lesson 5 addressed the pace of student writing. Students were asked to think of times when they had to complete tasks quickly, then told “the more you do something, the faster you become.” Students were then given 10-min to independently write a persuasive response. This was used as a “quick write assessment.”

“Quick writes” were administered by giving students a question related to a topic from any class, then providing them with writing time. For example, a quick-write in science class might be a persuasive response to a question such as “should teens eat junk food?” Not only are quick writes helpful for engaging students in the writing process, quick writes can also be a highly effective form of formative or summative assessment when graded according to a rubric that includes POW+TREE.

Students were explicitly taught each step of the SRSD, taught the required specialized vocabulary, asked to evaluate their own writing and the writing of others, given opportunities for revision, and provided with graphic organizers to provide scaffolding, which was then gradually faded with frequent checks to assure that understanding was maintained.

All students tested in the initial study improved their performance above baseline measures during the instruction, post instruction, and maintenance phases on both composition organization measure and a count of total words written. A follow up study was conducted the year after the initial study with other struggling learners. The students who participated in this study also showed improvements over baseline during the instruction, post instruction and maintenance phases in both composition organization and total words written, although overall quality of writing was not as high as the first group of students. The conclusion of the study was that the combination of POW, as a generic writing strategy, and TREE, as a genre specific strategy was an effective approach for improving persuasive writing in middle school students

with LD. The authors recommended that the students writing should be monitored and reinforced throughout instruction to maintain student gains.

Persuasive Writing: SRSD as POW+DARE

Chalk, Hagen-Burke, and Burke (2005) extended the TREE strategy to persuasive writing by adding DARE in place of TREE in a repeated measures study. The DARE mnemonic (**D**evelop topic sentence, **A**dd supporting details, **R**eject arguments from the other side, **E**nd with a conclusion) reminded 15 high school sophomores with LD to not only form and develop an opinion but also to state and then reject arguments from the other side to increase the persuasiveness of their text.

Chalk et al. provided scaffolded instruction, a six-step instructional procedure, and explicitly taught self-regulatory techniques. The writing produced by students was evaluated both by word count and by quality, as measured by a holistic rubric as used district-wide, where students earned a numerical score based on the quality of their writing, in four sections, focus and development, organization, fluency, and conventions.

High school students followed a six step writing process to improve their argumentative essay writing. Step 1, Develop Background Knowledge, was to establish skills the students would need prior to learning the strategy. Instruction began with activities focused on defining, identifying and generating the basic parts of an essay. Students were shown a chart with the DARE mnemonic. Each step of DARE was discussed by the group, then students practiced reciting DARE until they could recall it completely from memory. After students showed mastery of the DARE mnemonic, they were guided by a teacher to determine details for a given topic and practice rejecting arguments. Step 2, Initial Conference, involved reviewing the baseline scores students earned, setting a goal, and a generic three-step writing strategy very similar to POW, (**THINK, PLAN** using DARE, **WRITE** and say more.) Step 3, Modeling of the Strategy, involved the

instructor showing how to engage in self-instruction through a “think aloud” technique. The instructor showed how to use self-instruction for four areas, problem definition, planning, self-evaluation, and self-reinforcement. Step 4, Memorization of the Strategy required students to make a visual aid to help them remember both the three step writing strategy and the DARE mnemonic. They also recorded their personalized self-instruction questions. Step 5, Collaborative Practice, was a “we do it” whole group instruction, where the teacher facilitated the students writing an essay as a group. The individual goals set by students were also reviewed at this time. Step 6, Independent practice, involved students composing two essays independently. Students had access to visual prompts, and were given encouragement that was gradually faded. Students were given 15 min to complete each essay. The researchers found that the SRSD instruction produced better writing, and this growth maintained over time.

Argument Writing: SRSD as STOP, AIMS & DARE

De La Paz and Graham (1997) used the STOP+DARE strategy in a comparison study with three 5th grade students. STOP (**S**uspend judgement, **T**ake a side, **O**rganize your ideas, **P**lan as you write more) expanded and took the place of POW in the planning stage of an argumentative essay. STOP required students to generate ideas on both sides of a contentious issue during the planning process and examine those ideas from multiple perspectives during the planning phase. DARE (**D**evelop topic sentence, **A**dd supporting details, **R**eject arguments from the other side, **E**nd with a conclusion) took the place of TREE during the writing phase of instruction.

After SRSD instruction, students wrote essays that included more elements of argument. Additionally, essays were longer, supported their premise more thoroughly, and were qualitatively better. After the intervention was complete, 70% of the student essays included refutations of the alternative standpoint. Two of the students changed their approach to writing

and began developing an initial plan which they elaborated and refined as they wrote. These changes to the student's written product and student behavior maintained over time.

Kiuhara et. al. (2012) expanded the STOP+DARE strategy to include additional components for planning and drafting persuasive essays in a multiple probe multiple baseline study with six 10th grade students. First STOP was utilized in the planning phase of instruction to help students see an issue from multiple perspectives, choose their position, organize their ideas, and plan their writing. Next, AIMS (**A**ttract the reader's attention, **I**dentify the problem or topic so the reader understands the issues, **M**ap the context of the problem or provide background information needed to understand the problem and finally **S**tate the thesis so the premise is clear) was developed for this study, to help students construct a high quality introduction for their argumentative essay. Third, the writing strategy DARE was expanded to include **A**dd supporting ideas section and the **E**nd with a conclusion section, as recommended by grade level persuasive writing expectations. These strategies were taught to six 10th grade students who struggled with writing, and were receiving special education services. Students were taught in pairs during study hall.

Initially, as step 1 of the six stages of SRSD, the instructor introduced the knowledge students needed to use the target strategies effectively, the different purposes and genres of writing, and the three sections of a persuasive essay, the introduction, body and concluding section. Students also discussed transition words and how they tie an essay together.

In the second step of SRSD, the instructor discussed the purpose, qualities, and settings for a persuasive writing assignment. It was emphasized that students must gain the attention of the audience, then provide context, address their position and the opposite point of view, and that STOP, AIMS and DARE can help students write a better essay. Students and instructor examined and analyzed sample essays to determine the purpose, author position, evidence

used, and how the author addressed counterclaims. At this stage students were also introduced to self-regulation strategies that can be used to overcome writing challenges, and were given a goal planning sheet which featured STOP, AIMS and DARE with specific prompts for each step. This sheet reminded students of the strategies and provided specific goals for writing, including a check to determine if previous goals had been met. Students used this sheet to evaluate previous writing and set a goal for their next essay. As lessons progressed, students self-evaluated and used their results to set goals for their next writing assignment. Students also discussed self-instructions and the purpose of positive self-talk.

In the third step, students chose a topic and the instructor modeled how to plan and write an essay that included all the important elements of a persuasive essay by using STOP, AIMS and DARE. As the instructor modeled the writing process, they modeled the use of strategies by thinking aloud, as they created and used a graphic organizer on blank paper that included STOP, AIMS and DARE. The instructor also modeled positive self-talk. Students copied the notes and essay into their notebooks.

In the fourth step, students memorized each step of STOP, AIMS and DARE and explained the function of each step. They used flash cards and cue cards to assist in memorization until they showed mastery by independently writing the steps of each strategy on a blank paper.

During the fifth step, students planned and wrote persuasive essays by setting goals, evaluating their success and utilizing STOP, AIMS and DARE when writing responses to instructor provided prompts.

In the sixth step of instruction, students independently used the self-evaluation graphic organizer to identify parts that were included or missing in their own writing, made suggestions for elaboration of writing, and expressed what they would do differently in future writing

assignments. They also independently set writing goals and wrote complete essays that included all persuasive element parts. During and following SRSD instruction, students spent more time planning and writing their papers, and their papers became longer, more complete, and qualitatively better than prior to the strategy instruction.

Effects of High Interest and Low Interest Prompts on the Writing of Students with LD

Deatline-Buchman and Jitendra (2006) worked with five 4th grade students with learning disabilities to improve and enhance their argumentative essay writing in a comparison study. They found that argumentative writing is a very difficult task for students with LD, and that students may persist in writing errors such as using a more narrative format when an argumentative format is more appropriate, using poor evidence, disregarding the opposing view, or writing an argument that supports the opposition. While the focus of their study was not on prompt selection, the authors note that topics students are unfamiliar with (such as an amusement park they did not actually ever visit) produced lower quality writing than those topics that students had practical knowledge of, even when students select the topic as being of high interest.

Chlarson, (2011) found that student-selected high interest narrative prompts produced better writing in a single subject multi-element comparison study evaluating three 6th and 7th grade students with LD. Chlarson measured accuracy, total words written (TWW) and correct writing sequences (CWS) of high and low interest 3-min timed narrative writing prompts.

Initially, students selected 10 high interest and 10 low interest prompts from a list of 40 narrative writing topics. Participants completed 20, 3-min timed writing samples based on their selected prompts. The first 8 sessions for each student were completed with a long latency period between prompt selection and writing, while the remaining 12 sessions were completed using a short latency period between prompt selections and writing sessions. Chlarson found

that a longer latency period between prompt selection and writing produced results that were similar for high and low interest prompts, while a short latency period between prompt selection and writing produced greater total words written for high interest prompts, but accuracy remained similar to the accuracy levels of low interest prompts

At the time she wrote her thesis, she did not find any existing research on prompt selection. While it was not the focus of the study, Deatline-Buchman and Jitendra (2006) mention prompt selection in their study of argumentative writing, but at the time of this project, the only article I found that focused directly on prompt selection for students with LD was Chlarson's (2011) study.

In my project, I sought to extend Chlarson's (2011) research to determine if high interest opinion prompts, when coupled with SRSD – POW+TREE will produce better opinion writing in 5th grade students with LD following a long latency period between prompt selection and writing.

In closing, there is a significant body of research supporting SRSD as a powerful, evidence based practice for writing instruction both as a generic writing intervention (POW) and across specific genres (POW+TREE for opinion writing) for students with LD (Graham et. al, 2013), however there is only one study on prompt selection and how it influences the outcomes of writing for students with learning disabilities. Since the combination POW+TREE is a combination of a general and genre specific writing strategy that is an evidence-based practice for developing opinion essays for students with LD (Graham, Bollinger, Olsen, D'Aoust, MacArthur, McCutchen, & Olinghouse, 2012). The addition of high-interest opinion writing prompts may produce longer and higher quality opinion compositions with 5th grade students with LD.

Method

Participants

All participants were 5th graders with a current Individualized Education Program (IEP). LC was a female 5th grade student with a classification of Specific Learning Disability in Basic Reading. She received special education services in Reading and Math. According to her 2015 Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC-IV) testing, her full scale IQ score was 104, with a Wechsler Individual Achievement Test (WIAT-III) score of 80 in Basic Reading.

CS was a female 5th grade student with a classification of Specific Learning Disability in Basic Reading. She received SPED services in Reading and Math, and also received services through English as a Second Language (ESL.) According to her 2012 Woodcock-Muñoz Language Survey-Revised (WMLS-R) testing, she performed overall Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) tasks with 24% success in Spanish and 72% success in English. On parallel oral language tests CS performed with 43% success in Spanish and 79% success in English. On parallel reading-writing tasks, CS performed with 2% success in Spanish and 29% success in English. According to her 2012 Wechsler Nonverbal Scale of Ability (WNV) testing, her full scale IQ score was 105, with a WIAT-III Oral Reading Fluency measure with scores of 42 words correct per min with 83% accuracy on a lower grade 2 score, and 43 words correct per min with 74% accuracy on an upper grade 2 passage.

BP was a female 5th grade student with a classification of Specific Learning Disability in Reading Fluency. She received special education services in Reading and Math. According to 2013 WISC-IV testing, her full scale IQ score was 104, with a WIAT-III score of 85 in Oral Reading Fluency.

BO was a male 5th grade student with a Specific Learning Disability in Basic Reading and Reading Comprehension. He received SPED services in Reading. According to 2012 WISC-IV testing his full scale IQ score was 114, with a Woodcock-Johnson Test of Achievement (WJ-III) score of 90 in Basic Reading and 83 in Reading Comprehension.

Setting

This creative project was conducted in a public elementary school of approximately 600 students, located in a large district in northern Utah. The creative project took place in a resource classroom during the 45-min scheduled for reading and language arts instruction. Distractions were minimized by placing a “Do Not Disturb” sign on the classroom door. Daily curriculum-based measurements (CBM) were used by the resource teacher and the procedures for administering the CBM were well established. The participants were closely monitored and provided with positive feedback to ensure that they produce the best writing sample possible.

Materials

Before testing the participants, the teacher gathered a range of writing prompts on colored paper, lined paper and POW+TREE form for participant responses, pencils, colored pens and several timers.

Dependent Variables

Total Words Written (TWW). TWW (see examples in Table 2) was defined as the sum of the total number of words in the entire passage. A word is any letter or group of letters separated by a space, even if the word is misspelled or a nonsense word. TWW were measured and graphed by counting all words written in a given 5-min writing session. Words written after the initial 5-min were not counted as part of the TWW but were used to calculate passage accuracy.

Correct Writing Sequence (CWS). CWS (see examples in Table 2) was defined as two adjacent writing units (words and punctuation) that are correct within the context of what is written. A word is any letter or group of letters separated by a space. CWS were measured and graphed by counting all CWS in a given 5-min writing session. Words written after the initial 5-min were not counted as part of the CWS but were used to calculate passage accuracy.

Accuracy. Accuracy was determined by dividing the number of CWS by TWW in the entire written passage. The examiner placed a caret “^” between words that are (a) mechanically, (b) semantically, and (c) syntactically correct. The sum of the number of carets “^” was recorded as CWS. A CWS is two adjacent writing units (words and punctuation) that are correct within the context of what is written. Rules for scoring CWS in writing samples and an example of a scored writing sample can be found in Appendix A and B respectively.

Critical Components of Opinion Writing (CCOW). CCOW was assessed by scoring each full written response for quality, clarity and cogency, based on a TREE rubric shown in Appendix D. The TREE rubric provides a numerical value for four critical components of opinion writing.

First, does the writing sample contain a belief statement/topic sentence, (**T-1** point.) Second, does the writer support their belief with reasons (**R-1** point for each reason) and explanations (**E-1** point for each explanation). Third, is there an ending statement (**E-1** point) that reiterates the topic sentence? Finally, one additional point is available if the counterargument is provided. A writing sample with a score of 4 or higher would contain all four critical components of opinion writing for this project. Scores will be expressed as the total number of correct elements based on the rubric. The entire passage will be scored, including any words written after the initial five minutes or added during the editing phase.

Table 2
TWW and CWS

TWW: The sum of the total number of words	CWS: Two adjacent writing units (words and punctuation) that are correct within the context of what is written
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A word is any letter or group of letters separated by a space, even if the word is misspelled or is a nonsense word. <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My class is fun. TWW = 4 • My clas is fun. TWW = 4 • I ate a cupcake. TWW = 4 • I aet cupcack TWW = 3 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A caret “^” is used to mark each unit of the correct writing sequence. There is an implied space at the beginning of the first sentence. <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The^cat^was^small.^ CWS = 4 • All^of^the^kids^started^to^cry.^ CWS = 7 • All^of^the^kids^started^to_crie.^ CWS = 5 • The^flower^was^purple.^ It^was^pretty.^ CWS = 7 • The^flower^was^purple.^_it^was^pretty.^ CWS = 6

Reliability of Dependent Measures

To determine and maintain reliability of scoring across examiners, measures were taken to assure interobserver agreement. Two examiners independently scored a sample of four writings, one from each participant. Prior to scoring passages used in this project, the researcher trained the second examiner by providing a copy of a sample passage for each of them and grading it with the second examiner for CWS, TWS and CCOW, answering questions as needed. The second examiner was a para-educator with 10 years’ experience working with students with and without disabilities. She had worked with this group of students throughout the school year.

To score a passage for TWW each examiner underlined and then counted the words produced in the sample. Each word underlined by both examiners was counted as an agreement. Any word underlined by only one examiner was counted as a disagreement. If

students wrote after the initial 5 min, two scores were recorded for TWW, TWW in 5 min, and TWW in entire passage. The mean IOA for TWW in 5 min across scorers was 98% (range = 97% to 100%) (see Table 3). Disagreements between raters were due to (a) omissions of underlined words, or (b) different words underlined.

To score a passage for CWS each examiner put a caret (^) between each pair of words or words and punctuation used and spelled correctly. If students wrote after the initial 5 min, two scores were recorded for CWS, CWS in 5 minutes, and CWS in entire passage. Each caret placed between word pairs by both examiners was counted as an agreement. Any word pair given a caret by only one examiner, given two carets or skipped was counted as a disagreement. The mean IOA for CWS in 5 min was 97% (range = 90% to 100%) (see Table 3). Disagreements between raters included (a) omission of correct writing sequence or (b) a sequence counted twice, such as if a CWS included a line break.

To score a passage for CCOW, each examiner used the TREE rubric to give a numerical score based on each critical component. If both scorers recorded the same score on a critical component it was counted as an agreement. If one scorer recorded a different score, then it was counted as a disagreement. The mean IOA for CCOW was 100% (see Table 3).

Table 3
Interobserver Agreement

Student	TWW in 5 Minutes			CWS in 5 Minutes			CCOW		
	ex. 1	ex. 2	IOA	ex. 1	ex. 2	IOA	ex. 1	ex. 2	IOA
LC	87	90	97%	81	81	100%	8	8	100%
CS	78	77	98%	58	60	97%	8	8	100%
BP	81	79	97%	72	72	100%	6	6	100%
BO	40	40	100%	31	28	90%	5	5	100%
Mean IOA across all students	TWW		98%	CWS		97%	CCOW		100%

Opinion Writing Prompt Selection Procedure

Before testing the participants, the teacher made a list of 50 writing prompts, cut into individual strips of paper, with one prompt per strip. (See writing prompts in Appendix C.) The teacher tested each student individually. Each student was given this assessment three times total, with at least one day in between assessments. The teacher read aloud each of the 50 writing prompts. On the table in front of the participant, three categories were displayed and labeled on index cards, “prompts you would like to write about 😊,” “prompts you would NOT like to write about ☹,” and “neutral 😐.” Participants were instructed to place each topic strip in the corresponding categories. Initially, the participants were allowed to place each card in their selected category. However, at the end of prompt reading, if they did not have 10 total prompts in each of the “prompts you would like to write about 😊” and “prompts you would NOT like to write about ☹” categories, they were instructed to select from the “neutral 😐” category until each category had at least 10 prompts. If there were more than 10 cards in either group, participants were instructed to choose their 10 most or least preferred topics and number them 1-10. After at least 10 cards were placed in each category, they were sorted by the student and numbered as “high interest” for the top 10 “prompts you would like to write about 😊” and “low interest” for the top 10 “prompts you would NOT like to write about ☹.” After this procedure, the teacher collected the strips and stapled them to the card, in order. The topics consistently chosen by individual students as high interest and low interest were the final 20 prompts chosen for each student for the study.

SRSD Instruction

All students in 5th grade were previously taught the POW+TREE strategy as it applies to paragraph opinion/argumentative writing in a large group setting. All participants in this project showed mastery of each component of POW+TREE using a sample prompt before the creative project began. They were first given a refresher course of each step in POW+TREE and the whole group then worked through each step of a writing assignment, in an “I do it, we do it, you do it” format, which was initially untimed.

The teacher followed a four-step process. First, the teacher presented an opinion prompt and modeled each step of POW+TREE, explicitly noting the self-regulation used by thinking aloud and noting the self-talk used on a poster which remained in the classroom throughout the remainder of the project. This is the “I do it” or demonstration portion of instruction. Second, students were paired up and given a new prompt, then provided with support by the teacher and para-educator as they work through the steps of POW+TREE with their partner in an untimed practice session. This is the “we do it” or guided practice portion of instruction. Third, students were given a third opinion prompt and showed that they can independently produce a written response without a time constraint following the steps of POW+TREE. This is the “you do it” or independent practice portion of instruction. Fourth, students were given an opinion prompt and a 10-min time limit, and instructed to complete the steps following the time limits shown in Table 4. If students needed additional time, they were instructed to draw a line across their page at their current point of writing and then given up to double time on each section. Teacher gave the instruction, “you can have up to ___ more minutes. Let me know if you get done sooner”. Only the first 5-min of each passage were scored for TWW and CWS. Accuracy, CCOW and TREE score was taken from the complete passage.

Table 4
Daily POW+TREE Writing Steps and Time Limits

Time	Task
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1 minute	Think about the topic without writing (do not provide pencils or POW+TREE graphic organizer until this time has elapsed)
2 minutes	Brainstorm and write outline on lined paper with pencil
5 minutes	Write opinion passage on POW+TREE graphic organizer with pencil (collect pencils, pass out pens)
2 minutes	Review and edit passage.

The final timed prompt served as the initial baseline data point. After this, the preference assessment was completed for each student and they independently wrote in response to high interest and low interest prompts.

Independent Variable

High Interest Opinion Writing Prompt for each student. Participants were presented with a high interest opinion writing prompt randomly selected from their 10 chosen prompts. Once each prompt was used, it was removed from future selection opportunity so that each prompt was only written about once.

Low Interest Opinion Writing Prompt for each student. Participants were presented with a low interest opinion writing prompt randomly selected from their 10 chosen prompts. Used prompts were removed as described above.

Writing sessions were scheduled so that participants were exposed to equal numbers of high and low interest opinion writing prompts. The order of the first weeks' sessions was randomly selected. Sessions were counterbalanced over a four-week period so that the same number of high and low interest sessions were held for each participant (see Table 5).

Table 5
Prompt Interest Levels for Each Session by Student

Student:	Week 1	code	Week 2	code	Week 3	code	Week 4	code
LC								
Monday	High	1-1	Low	2-1	High	3-1	Low	4-1
Tuesday	Low	1-2	High	2-2	Low	3-2	High	4-2
Wednesday	Low	1-3	High	2-3	Low	3-3	High	4-3
Thursday	High	1-4	Low	2-4	High	3-4	Low	4-4

Friday	Low	1-5	High	2-5	Low	3-5	High	4-5
Student: CS	Week 1	code	Week 2	code	Week 3	code	Week 4	code
Monday	Low	1-1	High	2-1	High	3-1	Low	4-1
Tuesday	High	1-2	Low	2-2	Low	3-2	High	4-2
Wednesday	High	1-3	Low	2-3	Low	3-3	High	4-3
Thursday	Low	1-4	High	2-4	High	3-4	Low	4-4
Friday	High	1-5	Low	2-5	Low	3-5	High	4-5
Student: BP	Week 1	code	Week 2	code	Week 3	code	Week 4	code
Monday	High	1-1	Low	2-1	Low	3-1	High	4-1
Tuesday	Low	1-2	High	2-2	High	3-2	Low	4-2
Wednesday	Low	1-3	High	2-3	High	3-3	Low	4-3
Thursday	High	1-4	Low	2-4	Low	3-4	High	4-4
Friday	Low	1-5	High	2-5	High	3-5	Low	4-5
Student: BO	Week 1	code	Week 2	code	Week 3	code	Week 4	code
Monday	High	1-1	Low	2-1	High	3-1	Low	4-1
Tuesday	Low	1-2	High	2-2	Low	3-2	High	4-2
Wednesday	Low	1-3	High	2-3	Low	3-3	High	4-3
Thursday	High	1-4	Low	2-4	High	3-4	Low	4-4
Friday	Low	1-5	High	2-5	Low	3-5	High	4-5

Procedures

Each day, students briefly reviewed the POW+TREE strategy. A chart was displayed in the classroom with the POW + TREE strategy, and the POW+TREE graphic organizer (please see Appendix E) was provided with each prompt given throughout the study. The teacher reviewed the POW+TREE acronym daily before the writing prompts were distributed.

Participants were told that they were expected to write in school about topics they liked and topics they did not like, and that they needed to be good at writing about both “interesting” and “boring” topics. They were encouraged to do their best writing no matter what the topic.

Each student was given their writing prompt on lined paper, a POW+TREE graphic organizer, and two pencils. Students were told:

“You are going to write a short passage stating your opinion about the topic on your paper. First you will read a prompt and then you will write your opinion on the topic.

You will have 1-min to think about what you will write, 2-min to brainstorm and outline your writing, 5-min to write, and 2-min to edit your passage. Remember to do your best work. If you don't know how to spell a word, give it your best guess. Are there any questions? (Teacher pause/answer as needed) For the next minute, please think about your opinion about your prompt."

The teacher began the timer and allowed for 1-min of "think time" (students were monitored to assure that they did not begin writing during this time.) After 30 seconds, the teacher prompted: "you should be thinking about your prompt."

At the end of 1-min, the teacher said: "now begin brainstorming and outlining your writing." and restarted the timer for two minutes.

After 2-min had elapsed, the teacher gave each student a lined sheet of paper and said, "Now write your opinion regarding your prompt on this lined paper." The teacher monitored participants' progress and participation. If individual participants paused for 10 seconds or said they were done before 5-min have elapsed, the teacher moved close to them and said, "please write the best opinion passage you can" (this prompt was repeated up to three times per participant per session as needed.) At the end of 5-min, the teacher said, "Time is up. Please stop and put your pencils down."

The teacher then collected the pencils and passed out colored pens. The teacher said, "You have 2-min to review and edit what you have written." At the end of 2-min, the teacher said "time is up. Please stop and put your pens down." The teacher then collected writing samples and pens.

Over the course of the project, participants engaged in timed writing sessions of 10-min total, with 5-min for writing, for 10 each high and low interest opinion writing prompts, 20 total. Table 6 lists the prompts chosen as high and low interest by each student.

Table 6
High and Low Interest Prompts Chosen by Each Student

LC	High Interest	Low Interest
1	Would it be better to fly or breathe underwater like a fish?	Think of a time in your life when everything went right. What made this happen? What could you do to make it happen again?
2	Imagine you find a backpack full of money. What do you do with it and why?	Think of the most memorable day of your life (good or bad) tell why it was the most memorable with details.
3	What is the best school assembly you have been to and why?	Think of a time you "saved the day." How did you do this and what would you do if you had to do it again?
4	Imagine you woke up in the morning and you were 25 years old. What is the best and worst part of being 25 and why?	Think of your most disappointing experience. What made it so disappointing?
5	What is your dream job or career and why?	Think of a time you had a fight with a friend. Tell who was right and why.
6	Imagine you could switch places with your teacher for the day. What is the best and worst part of being a teacher?	If you had to leave your home forever with only three items, what would you take and why?
7	What if you woke up invisible? What would be the best and worst part and why?	You can spend the whole day with an older relative (like a grandparent) is this a good day? Tell why or why not with details.
8	Imagine you made a secret hideout. What makes a good secret hideout and why?	Imagine your best friend has a party and you are not invited. How do you feel and what do you do?
9	Imagine you get a mysterious box with an unknown creature in it that is the best pet in the world. What kind of creature is it and how do you feel about it?	Think of something you really regret. Why do you regret it?
10	Choose your favorite major holiday, (ex. Halloween/Christmas/4 th of July) explain why it is the best holiday	What is the worst thing that could happen to you and why?

Table 6 (continued)
High and Low Interest Prompts Chosen by Each Student

CS	High Interest	Low Interest
1	Imagine you find a backpack full on money. What do you do with it and why?	Think of something you really regret. Why do you regret it?
2	What should you do if you are alone in the house and someone knocks on the door?	Think of a time you "saved the day." How did you do this and what would you do if you had to do it again?
3	Think of the first time you played a sport or did something athletic. Was it fun? Tell how you felt about it in detail.	Think about a time in your life when something unfair happened. What made this thing unfair and what would have made the situation fair?
4	If you had to leave home forever with only three items, what would you take and why?	Think of your most embarrassing moment. What makes this most embarrassing? What do you think would have improved the moment?
5	Think of the best trip you have ever taken. What made it the best?	Imagine you get lost. What is the best way to find your way home?
6	What is the funniest thing that you've ever done? What makes this so funny?	Imagine you get to school and school was cancelled. Why would this happen? What would you do?
7	Imagine you play a great joke or trick on a friend. What joke would you play? What makes this joke the best joke?	Think of a time in your life when everything went right. What made this happen? What could you do to make it happen again?
8	What is your dream job or career and why?	Think of a heroic person (in real life or a story) what makes them a hero?
9	What is the scariest thing in the world and why?	Imagine you wake up for school with super crazy hair. What does it look like and how do people react? How does this make you feel?
10	Imagine you make a secret hideout. What makes a good secret hideout and why?	Imagine your best friend has a party and you are not invited. How do you feel and what do you do?

Table 6 (continued)
High and Low Interest Prompts Chosen by Each Student

BP	High Interest	Low Interest
1	What is your dream job or career and why?	Think of a time when everything you did turned out wrong. What made everything go wrong? What would have made it better?
2	What should you do if you are alone in the house and someone knocks on the door?	What is the best part of any day and why?
3	Think of the best trip you have ever taken. What made it the best?	Think of a time you “saved the day.” How did you do this and what would you do if you had to do it again?
4	Imagine you find a backpack full on money. What do you do with it and why?	Imagine you wake up for school with super crazy hair. What does it look like and how do people react? How does this make you feel?
5	Imagine you got to school and school was cancelled. Why would this happen? What would you do?	What if you could not do something that other kids can easily do (like ride a bike or swim.) What is it that you can't do and how would you deal with this?
6	What animal would you become if you could become any animal and why?	Think of your most disappointing experience. What made it so disappointing?
7	Think of your favorite part of being a kid. Why is this your favorite?	What is the best thing that could happen to you and why?
8	Imagine you get to switch places with your teacher for the day. What is the best and worst part of being a teacher?	Think of a time when everything you did turned out wrong. What made everything go wrong? What would have made it better?
9	What is the scariest thing in the world and why?	Think of something you really regret. Why do you regret it?
10	What would be the ideal birthday and why?	What is your dream toy? What makes it so cool?

Table 6 (continued)
High and Low Interest Prompts Chosen by Each Student

BO	High Interest	Low Interest
1	What is your dream job or career and why?	Imagine you wake up for school with super crazy hair. What does it look like and how do people react? How does this make you feel?
2	Think of the most memorable day of your life (good or bad) tell why it was the most memorable with details.	What is the best school assembly you have been to and why?
3	Think of the best trip you have ever taken. What made it the best?	Imagine you get to switch places with your teacher for the day. What is the best and worst part of being a teacher?
4	What is your dream toy? What makes it so cool?	Think of your most embarrassing moment. What makes this the most embarrassing? What do you think would have improved the moment?
5	What would be the ideal birthday and why?	What should you do if you are alone in the house and someone knocks on the door?
6	Imagine you play a great joke or trick on a friend. What joke would you play? What makes this joke the best joke?	Think of a time in your life when something unfair happened. What made this thing unfair and what would have made the situation fair?
7	Think of a heroic person (in real life or a story) what makes them a hero?	Imagine you get lost. What is the best way to find your way home?
8	If you could drive a car anywhere, where would you go and why?	Think of your most disappointing experience. What made it so disappointing?
9	What animal would you become if you could become any animal and why?	Think of what makes you most proud of yourself. Why is this important?
10	Would it be better to be able to fly or breathe underwater like a fish? Why?	Think of a time you had a fight with a friend. Tell who was right and why.

After 20 total sessions, students were rewarded with a class party and their writing samples were scored and graphed.

Experimental Design

An alternating treatment design (Cooper, Heron, & Heward, 2007) was used to compare the effectiveness of the high interest and low interest writing prompts. The alternating treatment design was selected because it allows for rapid alternation of elements (in this case, high and low interest opinion writing prompts) and differentiation of effects across two conditions. With the exception of the single baseline point from the initial timed prompt, no baseline phase preceded the alternating sessions.

There are numerous advantages to using an alternating treatment design. There is no need to withdraw an intervention to show its effectiveness; the relative effectiveness of treatments can be easily compared and concerns about intervention producing irreversible behavior change and sequence effects confounding data is minimized. An alternating treatment design can be used with unstable data, can be used to assess generalization, and interventions can begin immediately, without need for an extended baseline data collection phase.

Despite the advantages of an alternating treatment design, there are disadvantages and limitations that must be considered. Alternating treatment designs are susceptible to multiple treatment interference, although this can be mitigated by a following study where only the most apparently effective treatment is in effect. Moreover, an alternating treatment design is atypical of best teaching practices and classroom management techniques, and the required rapid fluctuation can feel artificial, contrived and undesirable to learners and educators. However, this can be mitigated by quick analysis of data and changes in intervention based on this data. Finally, the alternating treatment conditions must be significantly different, measurable, and able to be implemented in the instructional or experimental setting. Additionally, this design is less effective when used to chart interventions over an extended period of time.

Analysis of Opinion Writing Samples

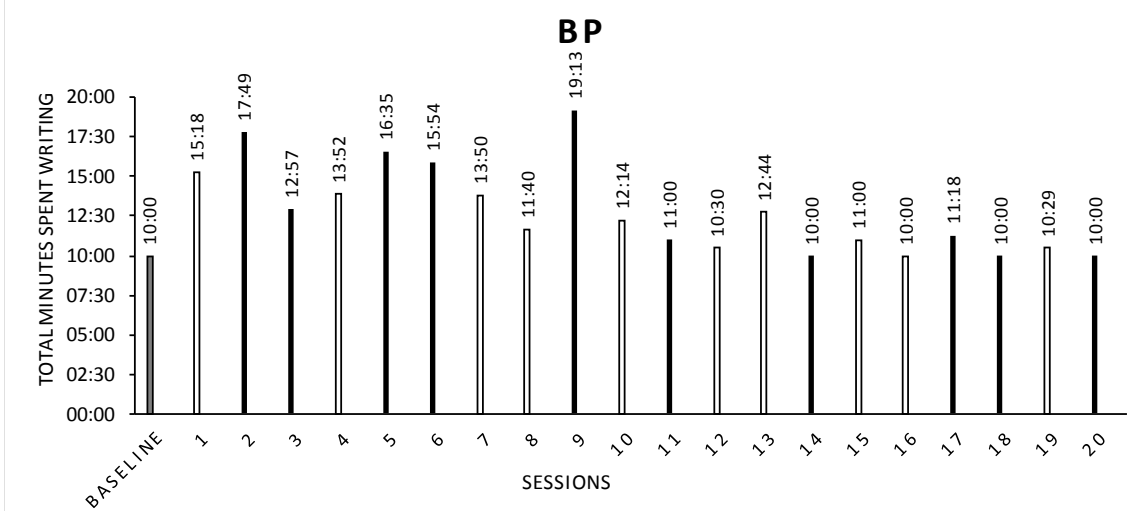
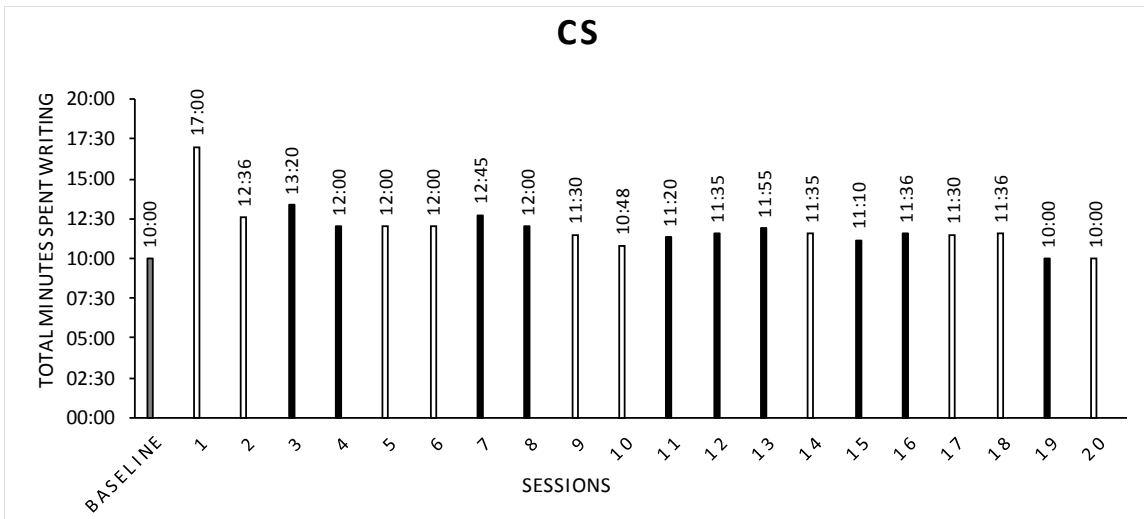
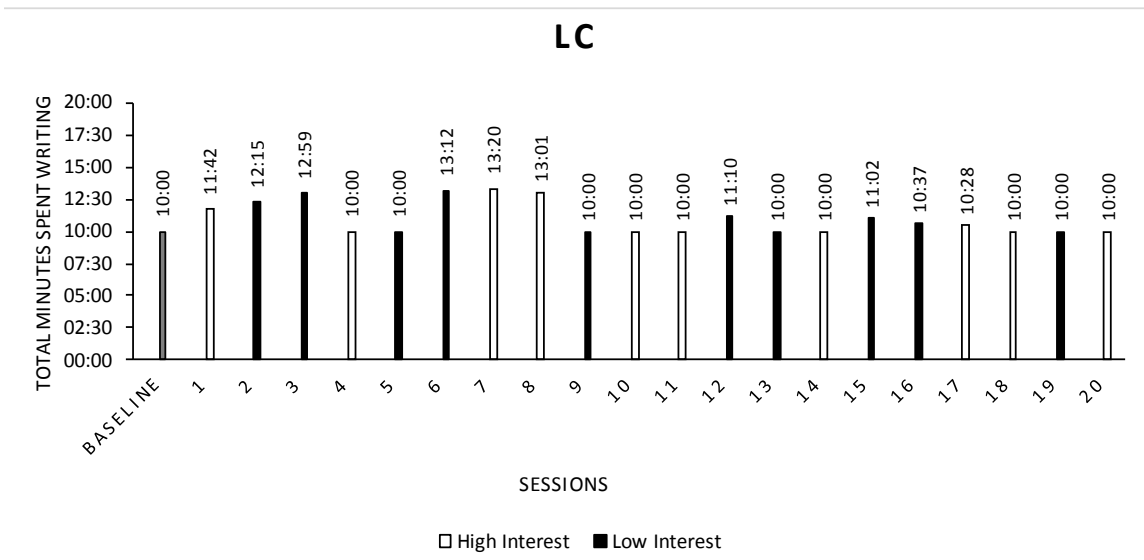
Writing samples were graded for Critical Components of Opinion Writing (CCOW) based on the TREE rubric, and analyzed and graphed for TWW, CWS, and Accuracy (correct word sequences/total words written.) Time spent writing was also recorded and graphed.

Results of High Interest Writing Prompts

This creative project sought to answer the research question: To what extent do high interest opinion writing prompts in combination with a POW + TREE opinion writing strategy result in more words written (TWW) more words written correctly (CWS), and better organized opinion compositions than when students with mild/moderate disabilities are provided low interest opinion writing prompts in combination with a POW + TREE opinion writing strategy?

The researcher anticipated that this intervention would produce overall increased TWW, CWS, Accuracy and CCOW in a timed writing sample for all participants, and these scores would be higher on writing prompts of high interest than writing prompts of low interest. A slight increase in CCOW over time was anticipated on both high and low interest topics as students became more comfortable using TREE in their opinion writing, and higher scores on higher interest topics was anticipated due to students writing additional reasons and accompanying explanations as part of their writing sample, however, since students showed mastery of TREE at the outset, growth in CCOW was expected to be minor.

The data show that overall, student responses to high interest prompts were very similar to their responses to low interest prompts, and it does not appear that the interest level students expressed in a topic, when combined with POW+TREE, had an effect on their writing, either in quality or quantity. Overall, each student generally utilized less extra time overall as the intervention continued. See Figure 1.



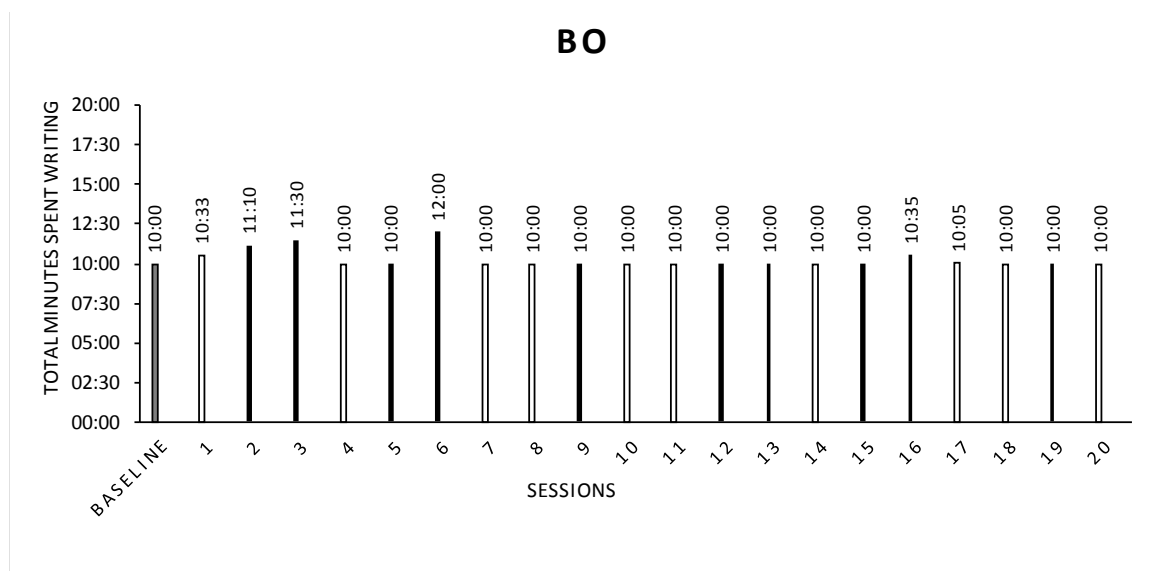


Figure 1. Session timings for each student.

Results for LC

Overall, LC improved her performance from baseline to intervention, however total words written, correct word sequences, and accuracy showed a decreasing trend during intervention. Notably, there was little difference in her performance on low interest or high interest prompts throughout the intervention.

In her initial baseline sample, LC wrote 44 total words. In response to high interest prompts following baseline, LC averaged 80 total words written. In response to low interest prompts following baseline, LC averaged 82 total words written (see Figure 2).

On her initial baseline sample LC produced 33 correct writing sequences. In response to high interest prompts following baseline she averaged 54 correct writing sequences. In response to low interest prompts following baseline, LC averaged 57 correct writing sequences (see Figure 3).

Her accuracy during baseline was 75%. In response to high interest prompts, her accuracy averaged 67%. In response to low interest prompts, her accuracy averaged 66% (see Figure 4).

Her baseline CCOW score was 3. In response to high interest prompts, LC had an average CCOW score of 10. In response to low interest prompts, LC had an average CCOW score of 8 (see Figure 5).

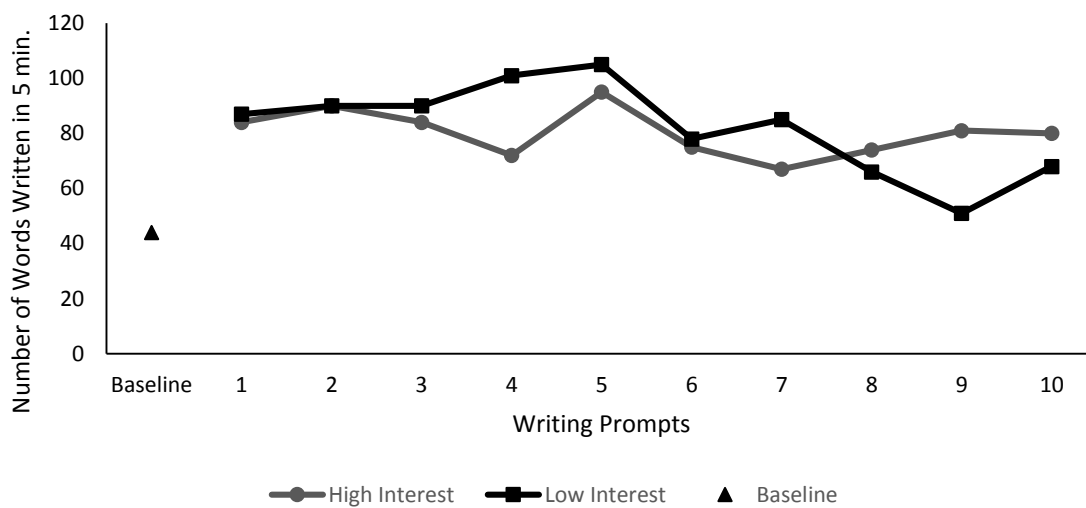


Figure 2. Total Words Written for LC.

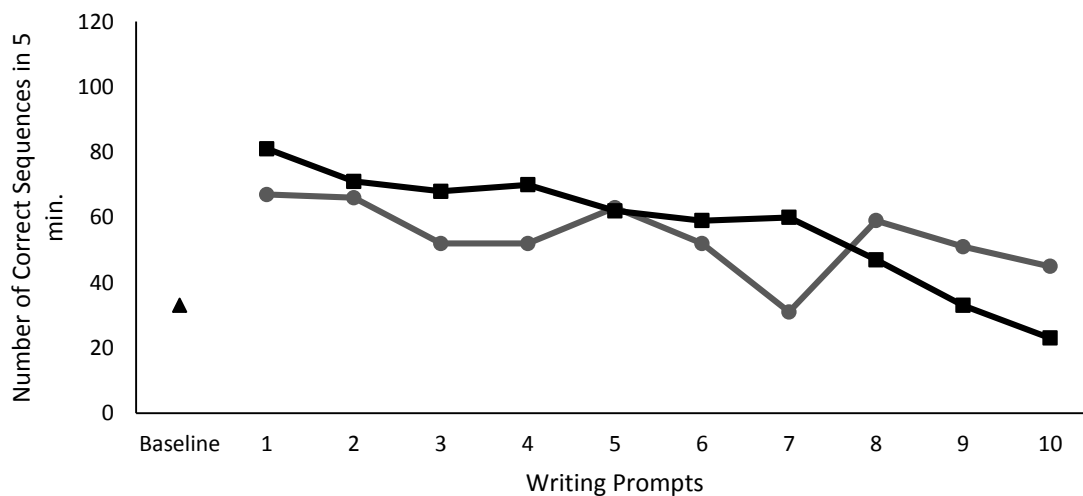


Figure 3. Correct Writing Sequences for LC.

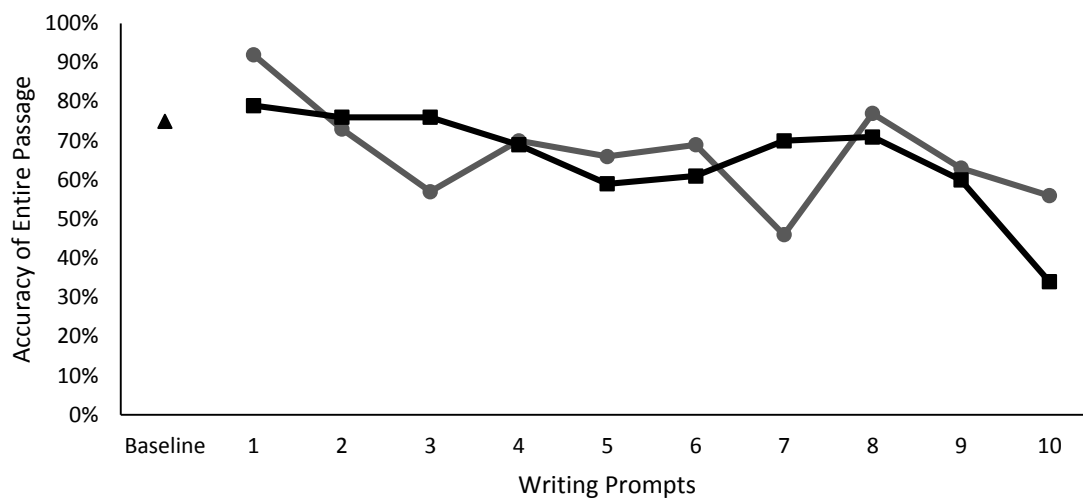


Figure 4. Accuracy for LC.

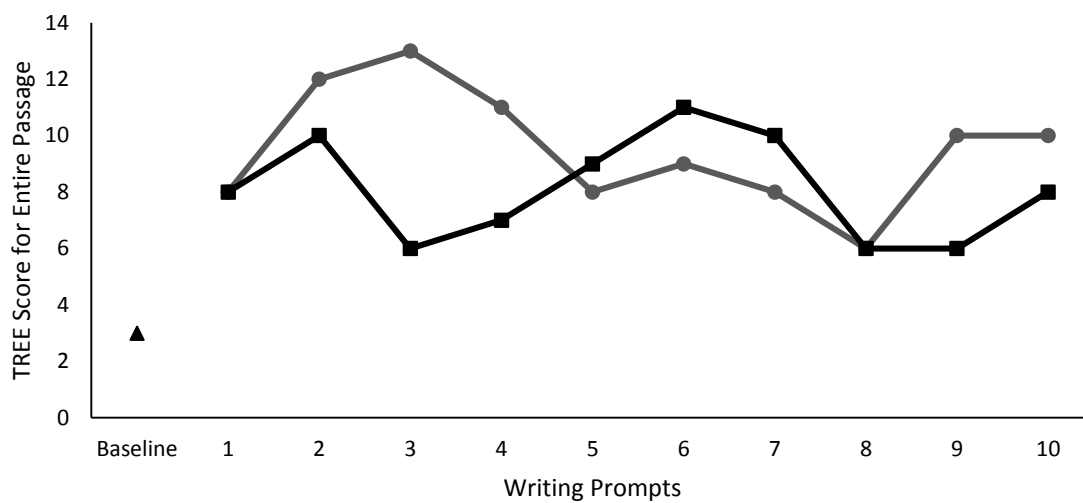


Figure 5. Critical Components of Opinion Writing for LC.

Results for CS

Generally, CS improved her performance from baseline to intervention, however with the exception of her first low interest prompt as compared to subsequent low interest prompts, there was little difference in her performance on low interest or high interest prompts in any measured area throughout the intervention.

In her initial baseline sample, CS wrote 11 total words. In response to high interest prompts following baseline, CS averaged 71 total words written. In response to low interest prompts following baseline CS averaged 71 total words written (see Figure 6).

On her initial baseline sample CS produced 6 correct writing sequences. In response to high interest prompts following baseline she averaged 60 correct writing sequences. In response to low interest prompts following baseline CS averaged 52 correct writing sequences (see Figure 7).

Her accuracy during baseline was 55%. In response to high interest prompts following baseline, her accuracy averaged 77%. In response to low interest prompts following baseline, her accuracy averaged 71% (see Figure 8).

Her baseline CCOW score was 2. In response to high interest prompts, CS had an average CCOW score of 7. In response to low interest prompts, CS had an average CCOW score of 7 (see Figure 9).

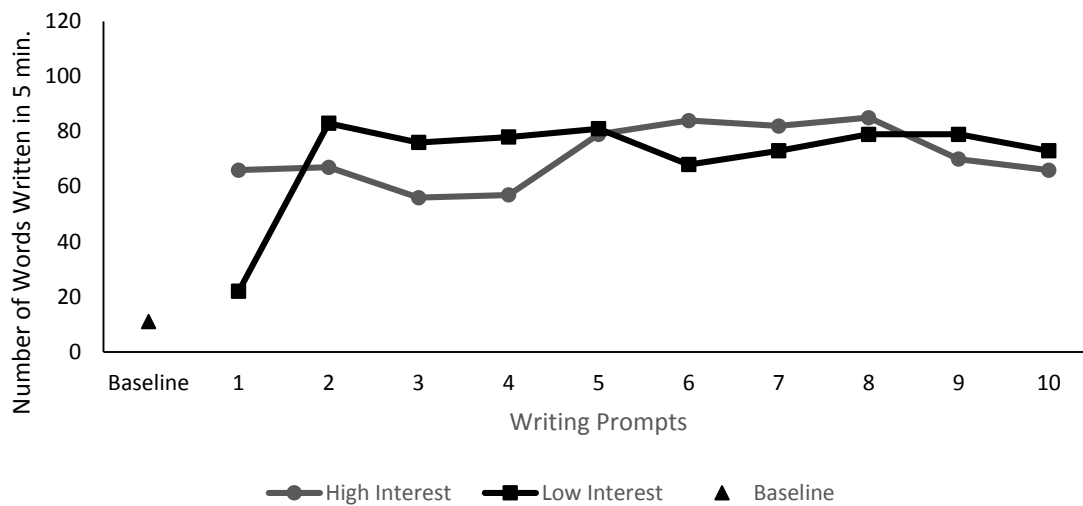


Figure 6. Total Words Written for CS.

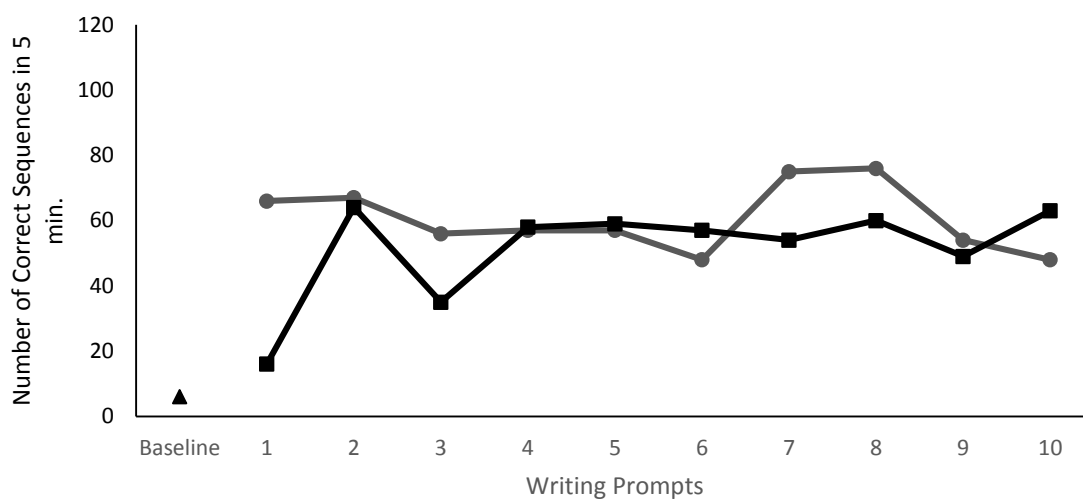


Figure 7. Correct Writing Sequences for CS.

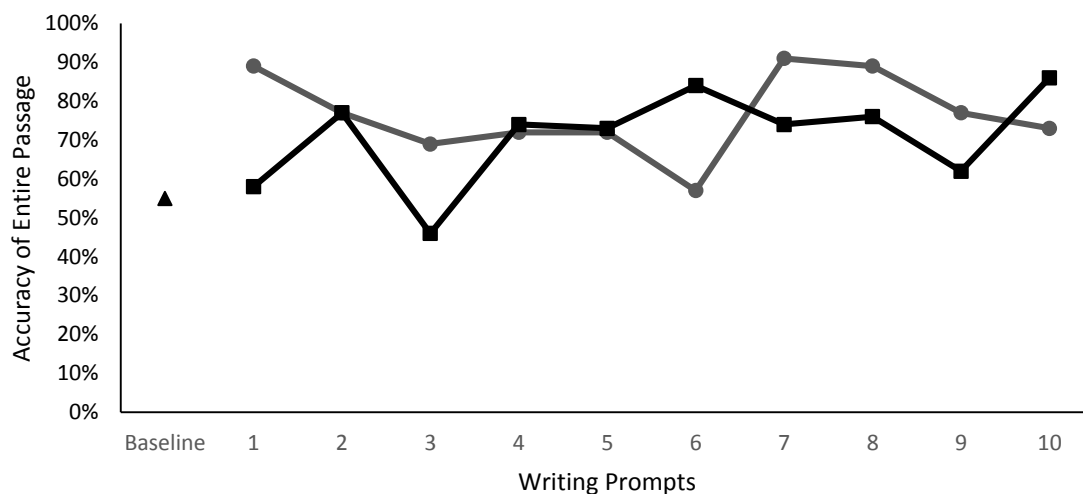


Figure 8. Accuracy for CS.

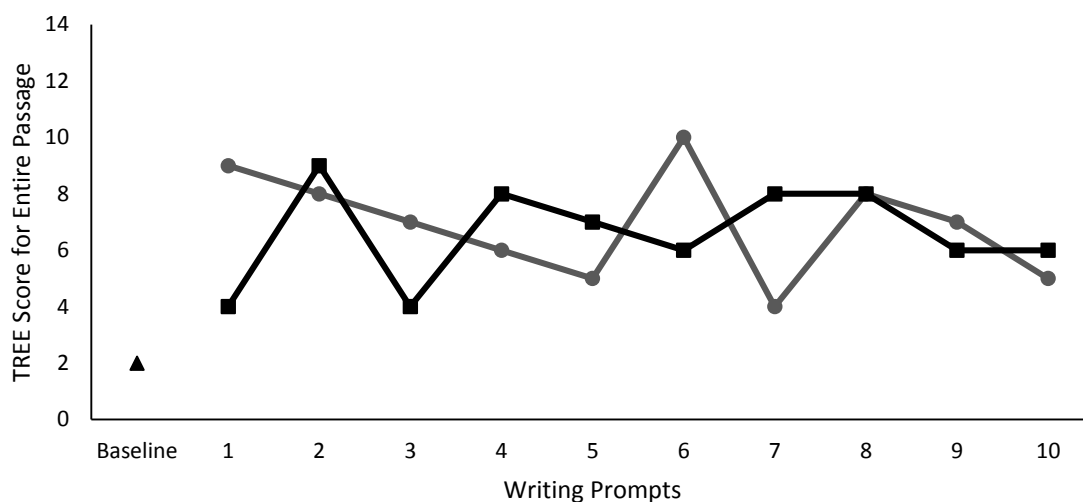


Figure 9. Critical Components of Opinion Writing for CS.

Results for BP

In regards to TWW, CWS and CCOW, BP improved her performance from baseline to intervention, however accuracy showed a decreasing trend during intervention. There was little difference in her performance on low interest or high interest prompts throughout the intervention. Notably, her average scores were actually higher for low interest prompts than for high interest prompts for TWW, CWS and accuracy.

In her initial baseline sample, BP wrote 22 total words. In response to high interest prompts following baseline, BP averaged 88 total words written. In response to low interest prompts following baseline, BP averaged 88 total words written. In response to low interest prompts following baseline BP averaged 92 total words written (see Figure 10).

On her initial baseline sample BP produced 22 correct writing sequences. In response to high interest prompts following baseline she averaged 77 correct writing sequences. In response to low interest prompts following baseline BP averaged 85 correct writing sequences (see Figure 11).

Her accuracy during baseline was 100%. In response to high interest prompts following baseline, her accuracy averaged 88%. In response to low interest prompts following baseline, her accuracy averaged 89% (see Figure 12).

Her baseline CCOW score was 2. In response to high interest prompts, BP had an average CCOW score of 7. In response to low interest prompts, BP had an average CCOW score of 7 (see Figure 13).

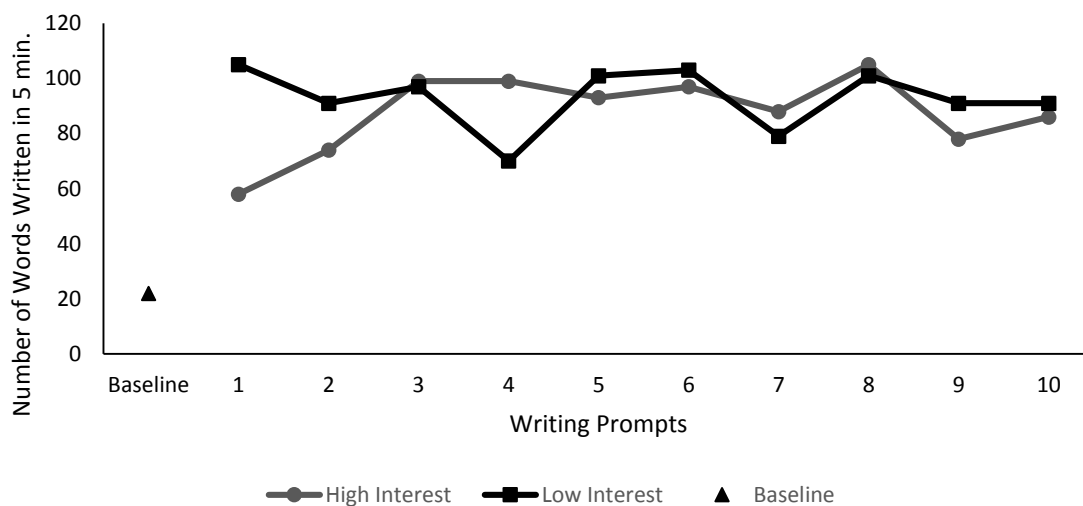


Figure 10. Total Words Written for BP.

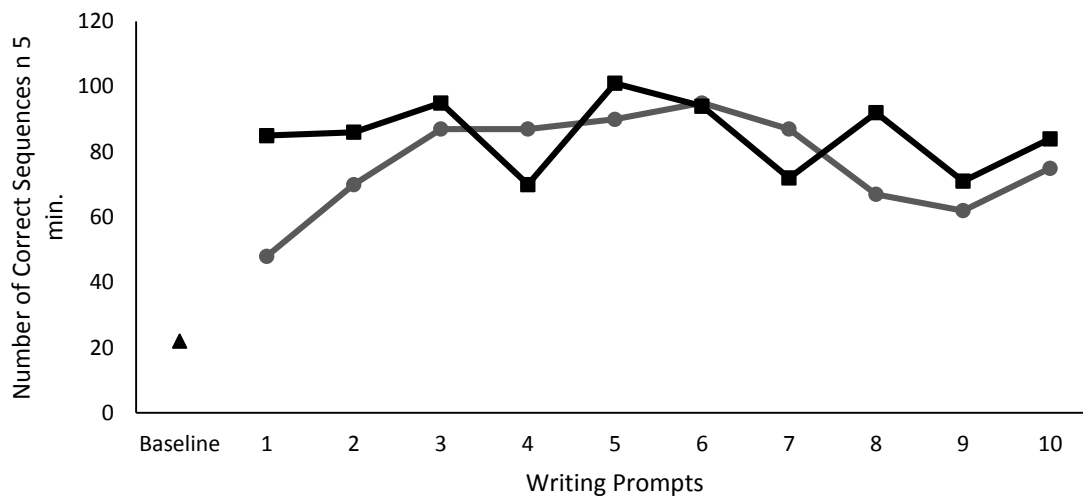


Figure 11. *Correct Writing Sequences for BP.*

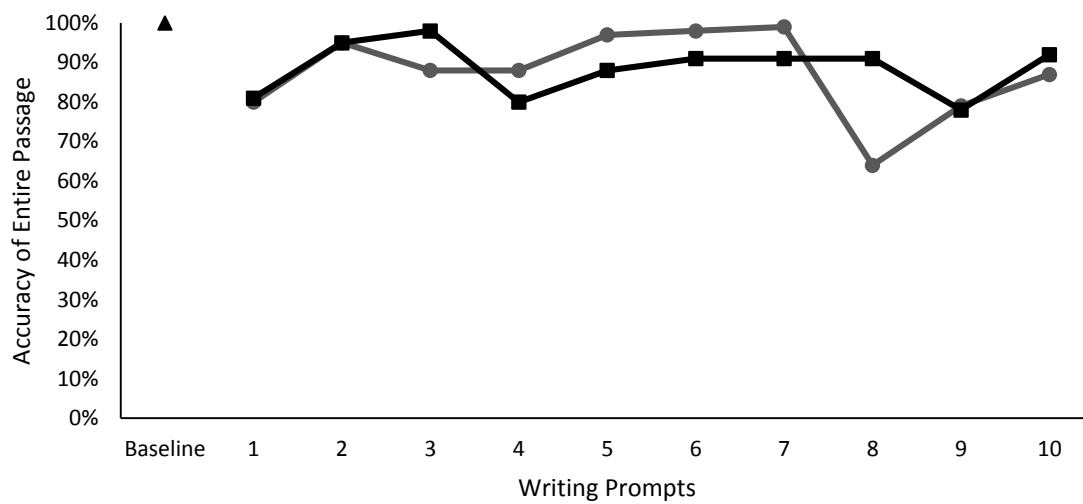


Figure 12. *Accuracy for BP.*

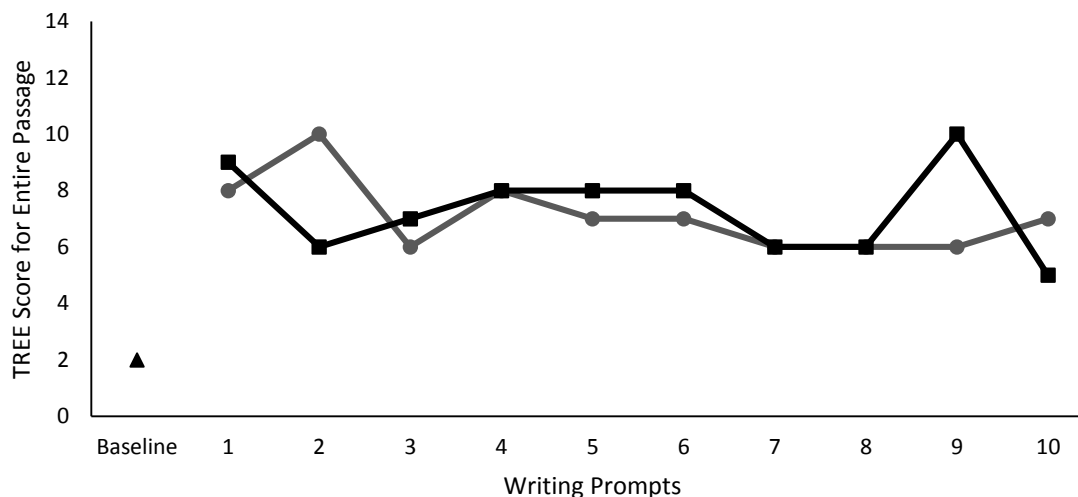


Figure 13. *Critical Components of Opinion Writing for BP.*

Results for BO

Overall, BO showed similar performance on both baseline and intervention conditions. Notably there was little difference in his performance on low interest or high interest prompts during the intervention phase.

In his initial baseline sample, BO wrote 47 total words. In response to high interest prompts following baseline, BO averaged 47 total words written. In response to low interest prompts following baseline BO averaged 47 total words written (see Figure 14).

On his initial baseline sample BO produced 41 correct writing sequences. In response to high interest prompts following baseline he averaged 34 correct writing sequences. In response to low interest prompts following baseline BO averaged 33 correct writing sequences (see Figure 15).

His accuracy during baseline was 87%. In response to high interest prompts following baseline, his accuracy averaged 70%. In response to low interest prompts following baseline, his accuracy averaged 72% (see Figure 16).

His baseline CCOW score was 8. In response to high interest prompts, BO had an average CCOW score of 7. In response to low interest prompts, BO had an average CCOW score of 5 (see Figure 17).

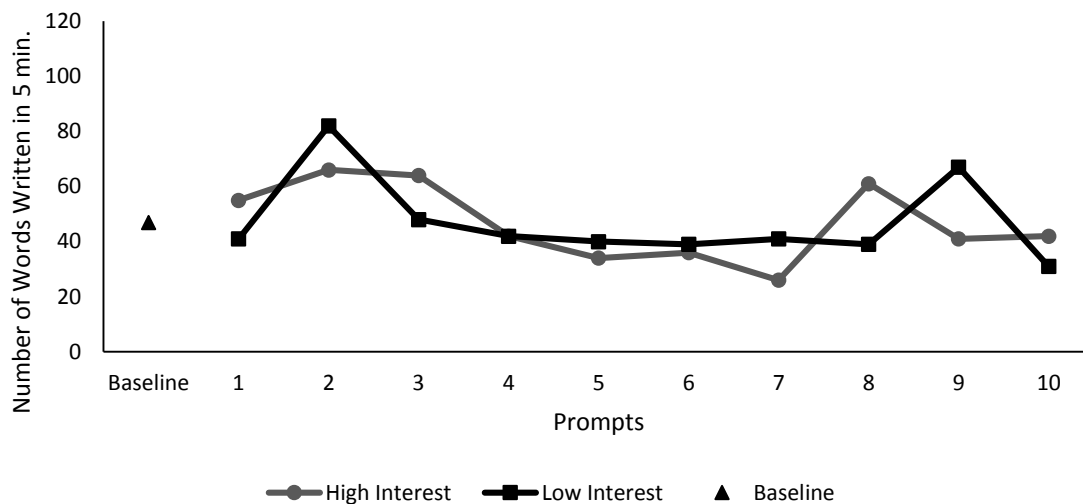


Figure 14. Total Words Written for BO.

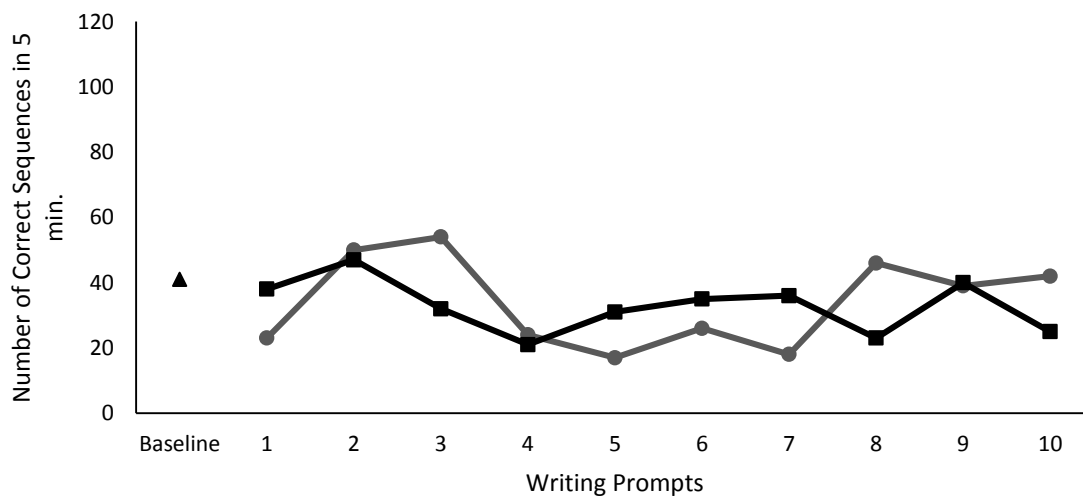


Figure 15. Correct Writing Sequences for BO.

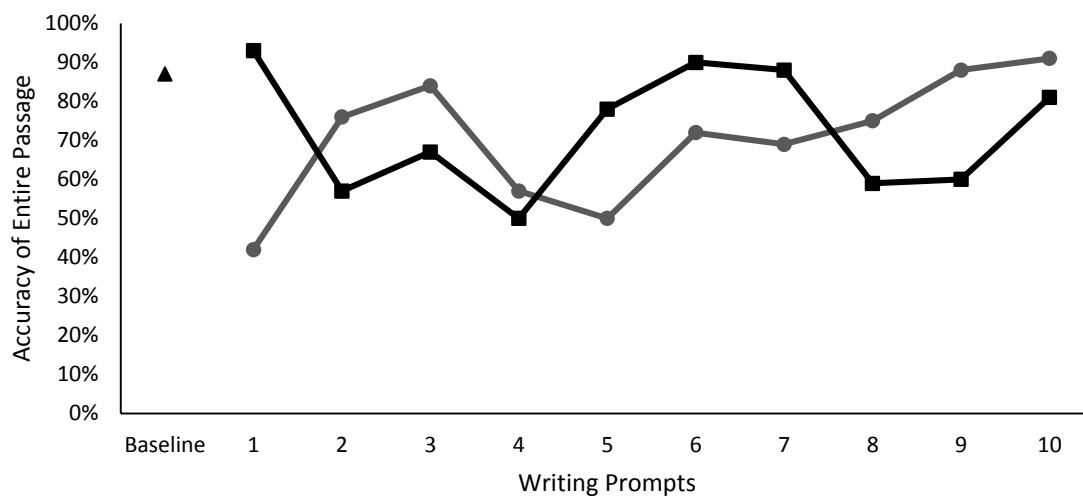


Figure 16. Accuracy for BO.

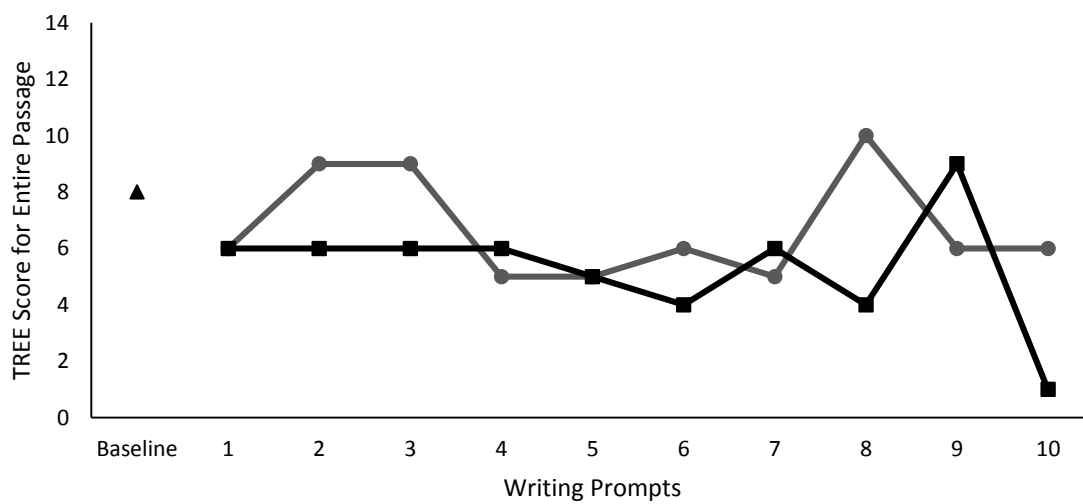


Figure 17. Critical Components of Opinion Writing for BO.

Discussion

Throughout the intervention, all four students in the group showed little difference on any measured dependent variable when comparing writing samples given in response to high interest and low interest opinion writing prompts in combination with a POW + TREE opinion writing strategy.

They wrote similar numbers of words (TWW), their sequences of words written correctly (CWS) were similar, their accuracy was similar, and their demonstration of the critical components of opinion writing (CCOW) and associated TREE scores were similar. In regards to this specific group of students in this setting, it does not appear that the interest level students have in a topic, when combined with POW+TREE has an effect on their writing, either in quality or quantity.

In her study Chlarson (2011) examined high and low interest narrative writing prompts for TWW, CWS and Accuracy in a 3-min writing sample. She found that use of a long-latency prompt selection procedure produced similar results for high and low interest prompts, but that prompts selected as high interest in a short-latency selection procedure produced greater results than prompts chosen as low interest in a short-latency selection period. Her students were not given a POW+TREE writing guide or narrative equivalent, and were instructed to write a narrative, compared to the opinion writing in this project. The POW+TREE guide in this project may have helped students produce high-quality opinion writing no matter how they felt about the topic. A short-latency selection procedure may have produced more discrete results in the opinion writing of my students. In her discussion section, Chlarson noted that due to the narrative format, students may have been less willing to write extensively about an emotionally distressing topic and their response to topics could change dramatically based on daily events. While potentially distressing topics such as embarrassing moments or fights with friends were

chosen as low interest by students in this project, they responded with their opinion in a similar way as to high interest topics, which may have been due to the less intimate nature of opinion vs. narrative.

The prompt students were given during baseline was a prompt selected by the researcher, and was not previously seen by students at any point in the project. It is possible that the lack of exposure to the topic resulted in less overall responding than they might have responded to topics they had previously seen, regardless of their interest level in the topic.

Specifically, LC was lower during baseline for TWW, CWS, and CCOW than during the low and high level prompt condition. CS was lower in baseline for TWW, CWS, and CCOW than during the low and high level prompt condition. BP was lower in baseline for TWW, CWS, and CCOW than during the low and high level prompt condition. LC, CS, and BP were similar in accuracy between baseline and treatment.

BO was the only student who showed similar scores from baseline to treatment for TWW, CWS, Accuracy and CCOW. It is possible that the similar accuracy scores between baseline and treatment for BO were due to his extremely positive attitude and determination. Throughout treatment BO would say things like, "I have to write at least a half page." Or "I have to write more than yesterday." He set these goals without prompting. His goal-setting behavior may have had a greater impact on his writing than the interest level he personally had for each prompt.

Limitations

There were limitations to this creative project. All 5th grade students with a specific learning disability and Special Education services in Reading were included in my group which precluded control group data collection, since no students were available for other control conditions, such as high and low interest prompts without POW+TREE organizers, or neutral

prompts with or without a POW+TREE organizer. All 5th grade students, were exposed to and showed previous mastery of POW+TREE, so there were no students given prompts without SRSD instruction and mastery. At no point in the project was the POW+TREE SRSD support removed for any students.

Students in this group selected their high and low interest prompts a well before they actually wrote about them. Their interest levels may have changed between when they chose a topic and when they were called upon to write about the topic. Chlarson found that a shorter latency period between choosing and writing produced higher levels of TWW, CWS and Accuracy in her study, as well as higher quality overall, and this may have also been the case in this group if prompts had been selected and written about immediately or very quickly. This adjustment in latency period was not provided to the students in this project.

Additionally, students may have chosen a topic as low interest but developed greater interest in the topic during the latency period. For example, one topic asked “what is the best school assembly you have been to, and why?” Between the topic selection and writing, all four students in my group were present at the end-of-year assembly where the principal publically shaved her hair into a Mohawk, which was likely to increase the interest level and enthusiasm students have in writing about this topic.

Students may have interpreted the terms “high interest” and “low interest” as “things I like” and “things I don’t like.” Thus, writers may have written extensively on topics they liked because they were enjoyable, and topics they did not like because they were enjoying expanding on their feelings and thoughts.

Since this project took place toward the end of the school year, rapport with students was well established. There were few behavior issues or peer interaction concerns that might have caused noncompliance or lack of enthusiasm, and students were very motivated by

schoolwide positive behavior and academic supports to do their best at any task they were given. Since students were highly motivated by their overall positive attitude towards school, the frequency and intensity of teacher praise and promise of reward (pizza party) and the support of their peers, it is likely that all students who participated were motivated to write at their personal best levels regardless of their interest level in any prompt given.

One of the hallmarks of an alternating treatments design is that students can readily discriminate between treatment conditions. Each day students were given a prompt and told to do their best, and were not told if their prompt was high or low interest. This may have made the difference in treatments indiscernible to students. If students do not recognize their prompt as high or low interest they may have simply done their best.

Since alternating treatment designs are subject to multiple treatment interference, students may have been influenced by the amount of writing in response to a previous prompt, or may have been determined to write at least as much as they did the previous day, or write to a certain point on the paper, or complete a certain number of sentences. BO verbalized this self-assigned goal on several occasions, which may have encouraged peers to also set their own goals.

While this project was timed, writing assignments in school are generally conducted without strict time limits, and the SAGE assessment is untimed. Students may have written more in response to high interest prompts if given more time to expand their thoughts.

BO struggles with attention and motor issues, so this may have limited his TWW. BO, LC and CS all struggle with spelling. CS is an English Language Learner, and while she is very fluent in her speech, some of her written grammar and accompanying CWS were affected by her limited English. BO, BP and LC all exhibit signs of anxiety and stress when given a timed task, and this may have affected their output.

Implications

If there was a clear increase in any dependent variable based on student interest level in writing prompts, this creative project could have been used to encourage teachers to provide a choice of at least two writing topics to students on assignments and exams, but the data does not support this. The data does show that students who are comfortable using SRSD of POW+TREE can write an opinion passage in response to a prompt.

Since the current end of level testing (SAGE) requires students to respond to a single writing prompt, and writing on a variety of topics/prompts is a significant part of the 5th grade CORE curriculum this creative project can be used to encourage teachers who feel that students may not do their best writing on a test or assignment if they do not have a high level of interest in the prompt given. It is clear that students who are given tools to write can write well in response to any topic when provided with a positive, encouraging environment.

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Appendix A Rules for Scoring CWS in Opinion Writing Samples

Rule 1. Pairs of words must be spelled correctly.

All^of^the^ducks^were^swimming.^ **CWS** = 6

All^of^the^birds^were_swimin.^ **CWS** = 44

Rule 2. Words must be capitalized and punctuated correctly with the exception of commas. Each sentence must have correct end punctuation. The first word of the next sentence must be capitalized and spelled correctly for a correct writing sequence to be scored.

The^bat^was^flying.It^was^getting^tired.^ **CWS** = 88

The^bat^was^flying._it^was^getting^tired **CWS** = 6

Rule 3. Words must be syntactically correct. Sentences that begin with conjunctions are considered syntactically correct.

I^had^never^seen^a^pie^that^big^before.^ **CWS** = 99

I^never^_seen^a^pie^that^big^ever.^ **CWS** = 77

And^then^the^boy^gave^the^girl^a^hedgehog.^ **CWS** = 99

Rule 4. Words must be semantically correct.

Steve^went^to^the^moon.^ **CWS** = 55

Steve^went^_too^_the^moon.^ **CWS** = 33

My^mom^made^the^cabbage^especially^for^me.^ **CWS** = 88

My^mom^made^the^cabbage_specially_for^me.^ **CWS** = 66

Rule 5. Contractions. Apostrophes must be used if the word cannot stand alone without it.

I^went^to^Steve's^house.^ **CWS** = 55

I^went^to^_Steves_house.^ **CWS** = 33

Rule 6. Words with reversed letters. Words containing reversed letters are included in the total CWS unless the reversed letter causes a word to be spelled incorrectly.

That^was^a^bad^joke.^ **CWS** = 55

That^was^a^dad^joke.^ **CWS** = 55

The^cat^got^the^ball.^ **CWS** = 55

The^_tac^_got^the^ball.^ **CWS** = 33

Rule 7. Story Titles and Endings. Words written in the title or endings that are capitalized and spelled correctly are included in the CWS.

The^Small^Duck^ **CWS** = 33

_the^_Small^Duck^ **CWS** = 2

_the^_small^_duck^ **CWS** = 0

^The^End.^ **CWS** = 3

^The^end.^ **CWS** = 33

Rule 8. Abbreviations. Commonly used abbreviations that are spelled correctly are included in the total CWS count.

Steve^ate^at^the^restaurant^on^Washington^Blvd.^ **CWS** = 88

Rule 9. Hyphens. Hyphenated words are counted in the total CWS as long as each morpheme separated by hyphens is spelled correctly.

My^brother-in-law^complained^about^lunch.^ **CWS** = 55

My_brouther-in-law_complained^about^lunch.^ **CWS** = 33

Rule 10. Numbers. With the exception of dates, numbers that are not spelled out are not included in the total CWS count.

_3_dogs^barked.^ **CWS** = 2

Three^dogs^barked.^ **CWS** = 33

It^is^February^8th^2014.^ **CWS** = 55

Rule 11. Unusual characters. Symbols used in writing that are not spelled out are not included in the total CWS count.

I^ate^a^sandwich_@_school.^ **CWS** = 44

Appendix B
Scored Writing Sample

Prompt: What is your dream toy? What makes it so cool?

^The^best^toy^is^the^DS_becas_it^is^small^and^fun^and^there^are^lots^of^games^to^play^with
_freinds.^I^want^a^blue_on_becas_blue^is^my_favorit._

TREE Score: 3

CWS: 25

TWW: 32

$25 \div 32 = 0.78$

Accuracy: 78%

Appendix C
Opinion Writing Prompts

1. What is the best song in the world and why?
2. Choose your favorite major holiday, (ex. Halloween/Christmas/4th of July) explain why it is the best holiday.
3. You can spend the whole day with an older relative (like a grandparent) is this a good day? Tell why or why not with details.
4. What would be the ideal birthday and why?
5. Think of a time you had a fight with a friend. Tell who was right, and why.
6. Think of the most memorable day of your life (good or bad) tell why it was the most memorable with details.
7. Think of a food you would like to never eat again. Why would you like to avoid this food?
8. What is the worst thing that could happen to you and why?
9. What is the best thing that could happen to you and why?
10. Think of a time you helped someone in need. Why did you do that? How did you know they needed help and how did you help?
11. What is the best school assembly you have been to, and why?
12. Imagine you met an alien from another planet. What do you think would be the most interesting part of the meeting and why?
13. Imagine you wake up for school with super crazy hair. What does it look like and how do people react? How does this make you feel?
14. Imagine you get to switch places with your teacher for the day. What is the best and worst part of being a teacher?
15. Imagine you play a great joke or trick on a friend. What joke would you play? What makes this joke the best joke?
16. Imagine you get lost. What is the best way to find your way home?
17. Think of your most embarrassing moment. What makes this the most embarrassing? What do you think would have improved the moment?
18. Think of something you have to do as a kid that an adult does not have to do. What is it? How would your life be different if you didn't have to do it ever again?
19. What should you do if you are alone in the house and someone knocks on the door?
20. Would it be better to be able to fly or breathe underwater like a fish? Why?
21. Think about a time in your life when something unfair happened. What made this thing unfair and what would have made the situation fair?
22. Think of the best trip you have ever taken. What made it the best?
23. Think of a heroic person (in real life or a story) what makes them a hero?
24. Think of a time when everything you did turned out wrong. What made everything go wrong? What would have made it better?
25. Think of what makes you most proud of yourself. Why is this important?
26. What is the funniest thing that you've ever done? What makes this so funny?
27. Think of your most disappointing experience. What made it so disappointing?
28. What is your dream toy? What makes it so cool?
29. Think of a time in your life when everything went right. What made this happen? What could you do to make it happen again?
30. What is the scariest thing in the world and why?
31. Imagine you got to school and school was cancelled. Why would this happen? What would you do?

32. Imagine you find a backpack full of money. What do you do with it and why?
33. Think of a time you "saved the day." How did you do this and what would you do if you had to do it again?
34. Imagine you woke up in the morning and you were 25 years old. What is the best and worst part of being 25 and why?
35. Imagine you make a secret hideout. What makes a good secret hideout and why?
36. Imagine you get a mysterious box with an unknown creature in it that is the best pet in the world. What kind of creature is it, and how do you feel about it?
37. What animal would you become if you could become any animal and why?
38. What is the best part of any day and why?
39. What is your dream job or career and why?
40. Think of the first time you played a sport or did something athletic. Was it fun? Tell how you felt about it in detail.
41. Think of something you really regret. Why do you regret it?
42. Think of something you really want to accomplish. What would happen if you accomplished this goal? How would you feel if this happened?
43. What is the best thing about your best friend?
44. Think of the best place in the world to live. Why is this place the best?
45. Think of your favorite part of being a kid. Why is this your favorite?
46. If you had to leave your home forever with only three items, what would you take and why?
47. If you could drive a car anywhere, where would you go and why?
48. What if you could not do something other kids can easily do (like ride a bike or swim.) What is it that you can't do and how would you deal with this?
49. Imagine your best friend has a party and you are not invited. How do you feel and what do you do?
50. What if you woke up invisible? What would be the best and worst part and why?

Appendix D
TREE Scoring Sheet for Student Opinion Writing Samples

Writing Component		Total Points Possible	Student Score
T	Belief/Topic Sentence: Student must write a belief and make reference to the topic	1 point	
R	Reason: Reason must support position stated in belief Reason can be stated in its own sentence One sentence can include multiple reasons Do not count the same reason more than once Count items in the same category as one reason If a list contains items that could fall into different categories count the number of categories as reasons *If a reason supports the opposing position, give 1 point for counterargument	1 for each reason, no maximum	
E	Explanation: Explanation must clarify why or how the reason supports the student's argument Do not count the same explanation more than once Explanation may be at the end of the reason sentence Explanation may be its own sentence There can be two or more explanations for a reason	1 for each explanation, no maximum	
	Counterargument: Actual argument or reason must be provided, simply stating the opposite side does not count No additional points for explanation or additional counterarguments.	1 point only	
E	Ending: Statement clearly indicates that the response has ended and restates belief on topic	1 point	
Total Student Score			

Appendix E
POW+TREE Poster/Handout and Graphic Organizer

P Pick my Idea
O Organize my Notes
W Write and Say More

TREE

**T**

TOPIC Sentence
Tell what you believe!

R

REASONS - 3 or More
Why do I believe this?
Will my readers believe this?

E

EXPLAIN Reasons
Say more about each reason.

E

ENDING
Wrap it up right!

POW + TREE

T **TOPIC** Sentence
Tell what you believe!

R **REASONS - 3 or More**
Why do I believe this? Will my readers believe this?

E **EXPLAIN** Reasons
Say more about each reason.

E **ENDING**
Wrap it up right!

